

**GURU NANAK  
IN  
WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP**

**J.S. GREWAL**

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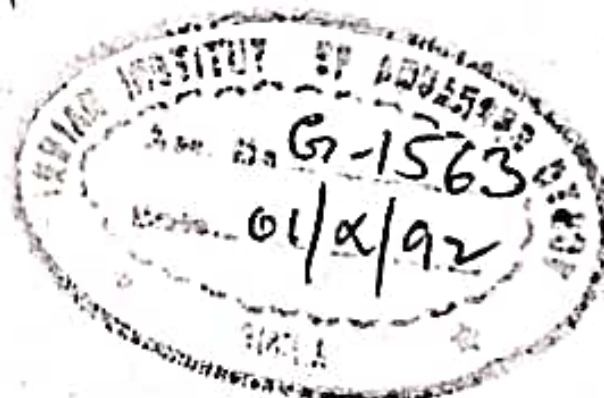
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## PREFACE

This essay is based on three lectures given at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study on the treatment of Guru Nanak in the works of Western writers. The broad context for this essay is obviously the emergence of modern historical writing, particularly in relation to 'orientalism' and Indian studies. This context is not explicitly postulated in the essay, but it obtrudes here and there as the analysis develops. The basic point that appears to emerge from this analysis is the assumption of a close connection between cognition and praxis in the writings of Western scholars on the Sikhs. This was the common ground for the administrator, the missionary and the 'orientalist'. Academic or scientific study of Sikh history and Sikh tradition has arisen not as an alternative to but as a culmination of the earlier motivating interests.

It may be added that this common ground is by now shared by the Indian and the Western scholar alike. Differences of interpretation are still there, but they arise not so much from differences in national perspective as from differences of class, conceptualization, talent and training. The validity of 'new knowledge' is at stake because of its social implications, raising the all important issue of its intended and unintended consequences for different people and classes.

I am thankful to the Fellows who responded to the lectures with valuable comments and suggestions. Mr S.K. Goel and Mr T.K. Majumdar have been extremely helpful in preparing and finalizing the typescript, and Mr N.K. Maini has seen it through the press. I am thankful to them.

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J.S. GREWAL

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The first work of some significance to appear on the Sikhs was *The History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs* by Major James Browne, published by the East India Company in 1788 as a part of the *India Tracts*. It consisted mainly of English translation of a Persian work entitled *Risalah dar Ahwal-i-Nanak Shah Darvesh*.<sup>1</sup> Major Browne had been deputed by Warren Hastings to the Court of the Mughal Emperor in 1782, and recalled by Sir John Macpherson in 1785. During his residence in Delhi as the 'English Minister' to Shah Alam, Browne tried to collect information on the strength, resources, disposition and the constitution of the states bordering the provinces of Delhi and Agra. The Sikhs became his 'first and the most important' object due to their potential threat to the Mughal Emperor and the Nawab of Awadh.<sup>2</sup> Browne commissioned one Buddh Singh Arora of Lahore to write a narrative account of the Sikhs in Persian. In collaboration with Lala Ajaib Singh Suraj of Malerkotla, Buddh Singh produced the *Risalah* in 1783.<sup>3</sup> To its English translation, Brownē added a short introduction at the beginning and 'a political chart' at the end to complete his tract on the Sikhs.<sup>4</sup>

Browne had no written evidence on the Sikh faith. However, he did not hesitate to surmise that the doctrine of Guru Nanak 'appears to bear that kind of relation to the Hindoo

<sup>1</sup> The text of James Browne's work has been reprinted in the *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, edited by Ganda Singh and published by the 'Indian Studies : Past and Present' from Calcutta in 1962. The editor has given a useful introduction. His footnotes to Browne's translation of the *Risalah dar Ahwal-i-Nanak Shah Darvesh* support the editor's view that its authors had a very poor knowledge of Sikh history. Nevertheless, Browne's work was 'extensively used' by the later historians like John Malcolm, W.L.M'Gregor and J.D. Cunningham.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ganda Singh notices two manuscripts of this work : No. 156/22 in Abdus-Salam Section of the Aligarh Muslim University Library, and No. Add. 26273 in the British Museum.

<sup>4</sup> Browne says in his Introduction that he thought of adding this portion because there is no information in the *Risalah* on the 'manners and customs' of the Sikhs. What he discusses in the Introduction is mainly their polity. His 'chart' at the end of the work shows that he was able to collect more information on the Sikh chiefs between the Jamuna and the Satlej than on the chiefs across the Satlej.



religion, which the Protestant does to the Romish'. He goes on to explain that Guru Nanak retained 'all the essential principles' of the Hindu religion though he 'abridged' most of its ceremonies and 'subordinate objects of veneration'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Guru Nanak was a reformer of Hindu religion.

Charles Wilkins' 'observations' on the Sikhs were published in the same year as Browne's tract. Wilkins was the first non-missionary European to master Sanskrit. As the translator of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the author of a Persian grammar, and an epigraphist, he is now placed among the eminent orientalisists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In 1781, Wilkins spent a couple of hours at the Harmandir Sahib at Patna on his way from Calcutta to Benares. On the basis of his talk with the Sikhs at Patna, he wrote his observations which were published later in the *Asiatick Researches*. In his view, the Sikhs stood distinguished from both 'the worshippers of Brahma and the followers of Mahommed'. In the book composed by Guru Nanak in the Punjabi language and in Gurmukhi script which was 'partly of his own invention', the unity of God, His omnipotence and His omnipresence are underlined. God alone was to be worshipped and invoked. Furthermore, Sikhism inculcated universal tolerance and universal philanthropy embracing all strangers.<sup>7</sup> On the whole, Wilkins looked upon Sikhism as different from Islamic and Hindu systems of religious belief and practice.

When James Browne was on deputation at Delhi, George Forster was passing through the Punjab hills, travelling by land from Bengal to England. The reports he submitted in the form of letters were published in 1798.<sup>8</sup> As it may be expected, he could not ignore the Sikhs, 'this new and

<sup>5</sup> *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> O.P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past: 1784-1838*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988, 21, 77-78, 95, 221 & 223.

<sup>7</sup> *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, 13-14, 69-70 & 71-74.

<sup>8</sup> Forster's work has been reprinted by the Languages Department, Punjab from Patiala in 1970 as *A Journey from Bengal to England, through the Northern Part of India, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Persia, and into Russia by the Caspian Sea*. Letter No. XI, which relates to the Sikhs, is included by Ganda Singh in the *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, 77-78.

Forster used notes prepared by Colonel A.L.H. Polier in the 1770s, but Polier's 'account' of the Sikhs was published only in the early years of the 19th century : *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, 53-56.



extraordinary people'.<sup>9</sup> His sources of information were different from those of Browne. His assessment of Sikhism too was different. Guru Nanak, in Forster's view, instituted 'a new system of religion' which forbids the worship of images and prayers to any other deity than God. People of all castes were admitted into the Sikh faith.<sup>10</sup>

In his *History of the Reign of Shah Aulum*, which too appeared in 1798, William Francklin refers to the Sikh faith as a new system; he refers also to the belief of the Sikhs in the divine origin of their scriptures. At the same time, Guru Nanak's system was 'composed from the speculative and contemplative theories of Mussulman divinity'.<sup>11</sup> Francklin, thus, suggested the importance of Islamic influence on Guru Nanak.

John Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* was first published in 1810.<sup>12</sup> He had come to the Punjab with the British army in pursuit of Jaswant Rao Holkar and decided to collect materials which could throw light upon 'the history, manners, and religion of the Sikhs'. He knew that several English writers had written on the subject, but their information he thought was of a general character and they 'served more to excite than to gratify curiosity'.<sup>13</sup> Malcolm was able to procure a copy of the *Adi Granth* from a Sikh chief, together with some 'historical tracts'.<sup>14</sup> Some works by Sikh authors were translated for him by Dr. John Leyden. His footnotes refer to sources like the *Dasam Granth*, the *Gyan Ratnavali*, and the *Bhagat Mala*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *A Journey from Dergal to England*, 291.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 293-94.

<sup>11</sup> *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, 97-98. For a brief analysis of Francklin's book on Shah Alam, J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: Assessments of the British Historians*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1970, 37-39.

<sup>12</sup> First presented to the Asiatic Society on April 5, 1809, and published in the *Asiatic Researches* in 1810, Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* was brought out separately in 1812. It has been reprinted in *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, published from Calcutta in 1958 by Susil Gupta Private Ltd.

<sup>13</sup> *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm also mentions that a copy of the *Dasam Granth* was procured by H.T. Colebrooke: 84 n1.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Malcolm attributes the *Gyan Ratnavali* (associated with Bhai Mani Singh) to Bhai Gurdas Bhalla and places him after Guru Gobind Singh: *ibid.*, 94, n23 & 97 n29. Rather innocently, O.P. Kejariwal looks upon Malcolm's work as 'the first serious study of the history of the Sikhs': *The Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 111.

For Malcolm, Guru Nanak was a man of more than common genius. He successfully contended with 'the furious bigotry' of Muslims and 'the deep-rooted superstition' of Hindus.<sup>16</sup> His was 'a creed of pure deism', grounded on the most sublime general truths. However, it was blended with 'the fables' of Islam and 'the absurdities' of Hindu mythology. Guru Nanak's aim was to reconcile 'the jarring faiths of Brahma and Muhammed'. He taught the Hindus and Muslims to abandon those beliefs and practices which were unworthy of the God whom they both adored. He called upon the Hindus to discard polytheistic beliefs and idol-worship; he called upon the Muslims to discard cow-slaughter and persecution on religious grounds. To effect mutual conciliation, Guru Nanak adopted the maxims of the Sufis in support of equality and tolerance.

His works are all in praise of God; but he treats of polytheism of the Hindus with respect, and even veneration. He never shows a disposition to destroy the fabric, but only wishes to divest it of its useless tinsel and false ornaments, and to establish its complete dependence upon the great creator of the universe. He speaks everywhere of Muhammed, and his successors, with moderation; but animadverts boldly on what he conceives to be their errors; and, above all, on their endeavours to propagate their faith by the sword.<sup>17</sup>

In Malcolm's view, Guru Nanak made 'no material invasion of either the civil or religious usages of the Hindus' because his only desire was to restore the original pure worship of one God among them. Therefore, he may be considered 'more in the light of a reformer, than of a subverter of the Hindu religion'.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *The Sikh Religion : A Symposium*, 90-91.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-29.

<sup>18</sup> *Loc. cit.* Malcolm held the view that it was useful for diplomacy to know the self-image of a nation. The most savage states are those who have most prejudices, and who are consequently most easily conciliated or offended; they are always pleased or flattered when they find, that those whom they cannot but admit to possess superior intelligence, are acquainted with their history, and respect their beliefs and usages; and, on the contrary, they hardly ever pardon an outrage against their religion or customs, though committed by men who have every right to plead the most profound ignorance, as an excuse for the words or actions that have provoked resentment': *ibid.*, 85.



For several decades after Malcolm no British civilian or army officer wrote on Guru Nanak's faith. Henry T. Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, based primarily on Captain W. Murray's notes, starts from the time of Zakariya Khan in the second quarter of the eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Murray himself had shown no interest in religion.<sup>20</sup> Interest solely in politics is evident also from *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore* by Major G. Carmichael Smyth, published in 1847.<sup>21</sup> These two examples highlight the fact that the majority of the British officers in the early nineteenth century were interested more in the present or the recent past of the Sikhs than in their origins.

This did not mean, however, that none of them commented on the faith initiated by Guru Nanak. W.G. Osborne, who published his diary as *The Court and Camp of Ranjeet Singh*, refers to Guru Nanak's indifference to all worldly concerns, his intercourse with *faqirs*, his trances and visions, his austerities, his view of reforming the Hindus and Muslims and 'that of reconciling the two faiths of the Mahomedans and Hindoos in one religion' by recalling them to that 'original truth which they professed in common' and by reclaiming them from 'the numerous errors into which they had fallen'. He taught them the sublime principle of 'devotion to God, and peace towards men'.<sup>22</sup>

Osborne was by no means the only British writer in this early phase to dish out a familiar fare. Lt. Colonel Steinbach, who published *The Punjab* in 1845, repeats what some of his predecessors had said on Guru Nanak and his faith.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Reprinted by the Languages Department, Punjab, from Patiala in 1970 (first published in 1834).

<sup>20</sup> Prinsep reproduced Murray's 'appendix' on the manners, rules and customs of the Sikhs, in which no reference is made to the faith enunciated by Guru Nanak and his successors: *ibid.*, 151-70.

<sup>21</sup> Reprinted by the Languages Department, Punjab, from Patiala in 1970 as *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore with some account of The Jummoo Rajahs, The Seik Soldiers and Their Striders* (edited by Major G. Carmichael Smyth, with notes on Malcolm, Prinsep, Lawrence, Steinbach, M'Gregor and the *Calcutta Review*) (first published in 1847).

<sup>22</sup> Reprinted by the Heritage Publishers from Delhi in 1973 under its full title which refers to Osborne's 'introductory sketch of the origin and rise of the Sikh state'. His view of Guru Nanak's religion is given on pp. xi-xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Reprinted by the Languages Department, Punjab, from Patiala in 1970 as *The Punjab; Being A Brief Account of the Country of the Sikhs; Its Extent,*



The unity and omnipresence of God were the tenets he enforced; and the immediate object which his teaching professed to have was to reconcile the conflicting faiths of the Hindoo and the Mahomedan. An enemy of discord, he treated the convictions of others with great deference, though he firmly maintained that they were founded in error, and coupling this course of teaching with an extremely simple and devout manner of life, he neither created cabals among the people whom he visited, nor raised up personal enemies and persecutors.

Steinbach goes on to add that Guru Nanak was able to convert a large number of Hindus and Muslims to 'a belief in pure deism'.

W.L.M'Gregor was interested primarily in contemporary history. His *History of the Sikhs* was published in justification of the first Anglo-Sikh War.<sup>24</sup> In his indifferent account of Sikhism, he chose not to follow the Punjabi authors because they would have enabled him to write only a romance. On this argument he felt free to use publications of the English writers, notably Forster and Malcolm. Their ideas are repeated by M'Gregor when he refers to Guru Nanak's belief in deism, his partiality to *faqirs*, his austerities and his peaceful tenets, and comes to the conclusion that on the whole 'Nanak's tenets evince a zealous desire to remove all the abuses and idolatries of the Hindoos, and the intolerance of the Mussulmans'.<sup>25</sup>

*History, Commerce, Productions, Government, Manufactures, Laws, Religion, Etc.* There is a separate chapter on 'the religion of the Sikhs' ; (ibid., 117-28.

W.H. McLeod has discussed Steinbach's work to demonstrate its worthlessness. Despite his nine year stay in the Punjab in the service of Ranjit Singh and his successors till 1844, Steinbach carelessly reproduces what Malcolm had written about the Sikh religion. His work was meant to support the idea that annexation of the kingdom of Lahore by the British would be amply justified : 'Colonel Steinbach and the Sikhs', *The Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. IX, Part 2 (October 1975), 291-98.

<sup>24</sup> Reprinted by the Languages Department, Punjab, from Patiala in 1970. The full title contains 'The Lives of the Gooroo's; The History of the Independent Sirdars, Or Missuls, And the Life of the Great Founder of the Sikh Monarchy, Maharajah Runjeet Singh'. The author was a surgeon in the army of the East India Company.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 35 & 45-47.

Interests other than directly political also found expression in Western writing on the Sikhs during the early nineteenth century. The missionary interest was represented by William Ward. He included the Sikhs in his *View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*.<sup>26</sup> However, this did not really mean that Ward looked upon the Sikhs as in no way different from others. He makes a distinction between the Brahmanical systems on the one hand and Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism on the other.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Guru Nanak appeared to him to resemble Chaitanya and other reformers who preferred the path of devotion to 'barren speculation and religious shews'. In Ward's view, Guru Nanak learnt the doctrine of divine unity probably from Muslim *faqirs*. He rejected the systems of Hindus and Muslims, but in a mild manner. He left many customs intact but not idolatry and other ceremonies connected with Hindu mythology.<sup>28</sup> Ward's interest in the contemporary state of the Sikhs was greater than in the origin of the Sikh faith.<sup>29</sup> Nearly all his information on the Sikh past was derived from Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs*.<sup>30</sup>

It would not be out of place to refer to Ward's purpose and assumptions. He believed that millions of Indians had been placed under the rule of Great Britain to be salvaged from a 'long degraded state' through 'intellectual and moral improvement'. Divine Providence had 'some great good to

<sup>26</sup> William Ward presented 'An Account of the Sikhs' to the Asiatic Society of Bengal on April 4, 1810. But it was not published in the *Researches*, perhaps because it appeared to be redundant after Malcolm's 'Sketch': O.P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 111-12 & 254 n141. The first edition of Ward's book, according to an entry in W.H. McLeod's bibliography in his *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, was published from Serampore in four volumes in 1811. A new edition was brought out from London in 1822, in three volumes, under the title *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos: Including a Minute Description of their Manners and Customs and Translations of their Principal Works*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 417-33 (for Buddhism), 434-47 (for Jainism), and 448-66 (for 'Account of the Sikhs').

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 448-49.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 460-66. These pages deal with the contemporary situation.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, xvii-xviii.



confer on the East'.<sup>31</sup> The people of India were very bad; but even they did not equal their gods in wickedness. To improve their moral condition, it was necessary therefore to change their duties:<sup>32</sup>

The Bible must supplant the narratives of their false divinities; their temples, covered now with sculptures and paintings which crimson the face of modesty even to glance at must be demolished; the vile lingham must be levelled to the ground; the festivals, in which are re-enacted shameless events in the lives of Krishna, and others like him, must be abolished; the scenes now passing before the eyes of that nation, sanctioned by divine example, must cease. Then will India rise from her deep moral depression.

Ward's interest in Indian religions arose out of a practical consideration: the introduction of Christianity in India. For this purpose, he wanted to demonstrate to his Western contemporaries the spiritual and moral degradation of the people of India.

The 'orientalist' interest in the Sikhs was represented by Horace Hayman Wilson, the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, who had lived and worked in India for nearly a quarter of a century. He had been closely associated with the Asiatic Society of Bengal, had translated the *Megha Duta* and the *Vishnu Puran*, and published a Sanskrit-English dictionary, besides a number of articles on Indian subjects. His 'sketch of the religious sects of the Hindus' had been published in two parts in 1828 and 1832. In this 'sketch' he divides the Hindus into Vaishnavas, Shaivas and Shaktas. But there were other 'sects' which in his view could not be easily classified. Therefore, in his 'sketch' there is a fourth class, the 'miscellaneous'. Wilson placed the Sikhs in this class. Furthermore, he made a clear distinction between the Sikhs of Guru Nanak and the Sikhs of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>33</sup>

Before the second Anglo-Sikh war, Wilson was invited by the Royal Asiatic Society to discuss the 'civil and religious

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Preface, xvii-xviii.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., III, 212-13.

<sup>33</sup> Ernest R. Rost (ed.), *Religious Sects of the Hindus*, Indological Book House, Varanasi and Delhi, 1972, 15 & 148-54.

institutions of the Sikhs' and to identify those which distinguished the Sikhs from 'the Hindus in general'.<sup>34</sup> He turned to earlier writers for additional information on the subject: the works of Malcolm and Prinsep, the travel accounts of Moorcroft, Burnes, Jacquemont and Baron von Hugel, and the fictional *Adventures of an Officer in the Punjab* by Henry Lawrence.<sup>35</sup> He also consulted the 'observations' of Charles Wilkins.<sup>36</sup> Like Ward, Wilson bracketed Guru Nanak with the reformers of medieval India, outlining their general characteristics in terms of religious ideas and their social significance. They were generally unlearned but thoughtful and benevolent; they felt dissatisfied with the religious practices of their countrymen and with the distinctions of caste; they attempted to reform these defects and to reduce the existing systems of belief to 'a few simple elements of faith and worship in which the Brahman and the Shudra, the Muhammadan and Hindu might cordially combine, and from which they might learn to lay aside their uncharitable feelings towards each other'. These reformers were not deeply versed in the Vedas or the Quran, but they were well grounded in both Hindu and Muslim tenets, and they sought to 'amalgamate' them. They combined the doctrine of transmigration and the Vedantic principle of emanation with the ideas of the Sufis. They addressed the common people in their own language, and the literature they produced came to have considerable influence on a large portion of the agricultural population of Northern India.<sup>37</sup>

Guru Nanak was one of these reformers, but he came to exercise greater influence than the others due to 'political events' which transformed a sect into a nation. He was, therefore, only 'the nominal founder' of the religion and nation of the Sikhs. In Wilson's view, the Sikhs who 'restricted their views to purely religious objects', like the Udasis and the Nirmalas, were the true followers of Guru Nanak.<sup>38</sup> The

<sup>34</sup> H.H. Wilson's article was published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1848 and reprinted in *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, under the title 'Civil and Religious Institutions of the Sikhs'.

<sup>35</sup> *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, 69 n10.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.



original elements of Sikhism were deism of a mystical tendency, contemplative worship, peace and good will, and amalgamation of Muslims and Hindus. There was not much of dogma and precept in Sikhism, and its doctrines were inculcated through the channel of mystical and moral verses in a popular style.

Guru Nanak appeared to Wilson to have in mind the amelioration of the creed or usages of the people: 'he does not seem to have formally abolished caste although he received proselytes from every order, and while he treated the Koran with reverence he acknowledged the whole scheme of Hindu mythology; so do his followers to the present day, that is, such of his followers as profess the pure Sikh faith'.<sup>39</sup> The creed of Guru Nanak was a sort of spiritual quietism in which one divine cause and essence of all things was acknowledged.<sup>40</sup> This creed was transformed into something quite different by Guru Nanak's successors, notably Guru Gobind Singh. In Wilson's view, there was little difference between a Nirmala Sikh and an orthodox Hindu of the Vaishnava sect 'except in the mode of performing public worship, and in the profession of benevolent sentiments for all mankind' among the true Sikhs.<sup>41</sup> On the whole, Guru Nanak for Wilson was more akin to, rather than different from, other reformers of the times. Sikhism differed from the other movements of reform only in its later development.

Wilson thought that in moral terms Sikhism scarcely deserved the name of 'a religious faith'. In the compositions of Guru Nanak, according to Wilson, there is a vague notion of a creator as the source of all things, but this deity is defined by negatives. The only worship of him consists of the chanting of hymns which contain allusions to a benevolent and powerful being. The belief of the Sikhs in divine intervention in mundane affairs exercises little influence on their practice. There is no public adoration of Hindu deities, but their existence is not disputed. The great distinction between the Sikhs and the other Hindus is the abolition of the distinctions of caste. But even this was not necessarily a gain. In any case, 'the worship of the Book and of the

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 64.



Sword, and the moral declamations of the contributors to the sacred Granth, have led to as great, if not a greater, laxity of conduct, and as utter a disregard of both religious and moral obligations, as the superstitious belief and multiplied ceremonial of the Brahmans'.<sup>42</sup>

The most comprehensive work on the Sikhs appeared in 1849, written on the eve of the annexation of the kingdom of Lahore to the British empire. This was J.D. Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs*.<sup>43</sup> He had read the work of all his predecessors and a lot more. For the first time in British historical writing on the Sikhs, we come across a historian who relied on a personal understanding of the compositions of Guru Nanak.

Like Wilson, Cunningham places the Sikh movement in the broad context of the religious history of the Indian peoples. Starting with Brahmanic civilization of the Aryans, Cunningham looks upon Buddhism as an important religious phenomenon in Indian history, seeing a link between it and the 'ancient faith of India'. Hinduism, in any case, was fully developed before the beginning of the Christian era; the philosophy of the learned few was firmly allied with the theology of the believing many, and the basic articles of faith were laid down: the unity of God, the creation of the world, the immortality of the soul, and the responsibility of man. Before long, however, the immortality of the soul was encumbered with the doctrine of transmigration, the active virtues were perhaps deemed less meritorious than bodily austerities and mental abstractions, and polity was clogged by the dogma of inequality and the institution of a hereditary priestly class. Hinduism attained its limits with success against Buddhism and the triumph of Shankara Acharya. His victory brought with it the seeds of decay. The tradition of monastic orders, borrowed from Buddhism, was appropriated not only by Shankara but also by Ramanuja; both of them attributed form and qualities to the Supreme Being; both of them subscribed to the doctrine of *maya*; and both of them assumed the position of a spiritual master.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>43</sup> For an analysis of Cunningham's work, J.S. Grewal, 'J.D. Cunningham as a Historian of the Sikhs', *From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar 1982 (2nd. ed.), 169-88.



Such was the state of the Hindu faith or polity a thousand years after Christ. The fitness of the original system for general adoption had been materially impaired by the gradual recognition of distinction of race; the Brahmans had isolated themselves from the soldiers and the peasants and they destroyed their own unanimity by admitting a virtual plurality of gods, and by giving assemblies of ascetics a pre-eminence over communities of pious householders. In a short time the gods were regarded as rivals, and their worshippers as antagonists.<sup>44</sup>

The decline of decaying Hinduism was hastened by the entry of the Turkish conquerors into India. In due course, however, their presence began to influence the people of India, and they themselves began to be influenced by the new environment. Muslim saints and martyrs began to rival Krishna and Bhairon in the number of their miracles, and the Muslims almost forgot the unity of God in the multitude of intercessors whose aid they implored. 'Thus custom jarred with custom, and opinion with opinion, and while the few always fell back with confidence upon their revelations, the Koran and Vedas, the public mind became agitated, and found no sure resting-place with Brahmans or Mullas, with Mahadev or Muhammad'.<sup>45</sup> This discontent among the people under Turko-Afghan rule found expression in movements for reform.

The first reformer mentioned by Cunningham is Ramanand, a follower of the tenets of Ramanuja, who made Rama the object of devotion, propagated the idea of man's equality before God, admitted all classes of people as his disciples, and preached liberation. Like Ramanand in the Middle Ganges, Gorakhnath in the Punjab taught that intense mental abstraction could etherialize the body of the most lowly and unite his spirit with the all-pervading soul of the world; he chose his votaries from all castes; and he introduced the practice of boring their ears as a mark of initiation into yoga. What was significant for Cunningham in these two movements was that faith or abandonment of the pleasures of life was believed to abrogate the distinctions of race 'which

<sup>44</sup> J.D. Cunningham, *A History of the Sikhs from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi (reprint), 1955, 17-27.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-29.

had taken so firm a hold on the pride and vanity of the rich and powerful'.<sup>46</sup>

Kabir in the next generation assailed the worship of idols, the authority of the Quran and the Shastras, and the use of Sanskrit; he addressed himself to both Muslims and Hindus, asking them to cultivate inward purity and to fortify themselves against the lure of *maya*. According to Cunningham, Kabir attributed form and qualities to God as Rama or Vishnu and limited the application of his doctrines of reform by declaring that retirement from the world was desirable. In the sixteenth century, Chaitanya in Bengal insisted on *bhakti* as the instrument of chastening the most impure, converted some Muslims also to his way, and allowed marriage and secular occupations. Vallabha Swamy gave further impulse to 'the reformation in progress', giving preference to the householder over the renunciant, but he added to the diversity of the prevailing idolatry by giving pre-eminence to Bal Gopal, the infant Krishna, as the very God of the Universe.<sup>47</sup>

Cunningham placed Guru Nanak in the context of this reformation, but not to imply similarities so much as to underline the distinction. His summing up of the situation has been quoted by subsequent writers to the present day:<sup>48</sup>

Thus, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Hindu mind was no longer stagnant or retrogressive; it had been leavened with Muhammadanism, and changed and quickened for a new development. Ramanand and Gorakh had preached religious equality, and Chaitan had repeated that faith levelled caste. Kabir had denounced images, and appealed to the people in their own tongue, and Vallabh had taught that effectual devotion was compatible with the ordinary duties of the world. But these good and able men appear to have been so impressed with the nothingness of this life, that they deemed the amelioration of man's social condition to be unworthy of a thought. They aimed chiefly at emancipation from priestcraft, or from the grossness of idolatry and polytheism. They formed pious associations of contented Quietists, or they

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 34.



gave themselves up to the contemplation of futurity in the hope of approaching bliss, rather than called upon their fellow creatures to throw aside every social as well as religious trammel, and to arise a new people freed from the debasing corruption of ages. They perfected forms of dissent rather than planted the germs of nations, and their sects remain to this day as they left them. It was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform, and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor Gobind to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality, and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes.

According to Cunningham, Guru Nanak made himself familiar with the popular creeds of Muslims and Hindus, and acquired a general knowledge of the Quran and the Shastras. In due course he came to feel, however, that none of the prevalent creeds was satisfactory: 'he had read Koran and Purans, but God he had nowhere found'.<sup>49</sup> Guru Nanak appropriated the excellences of preceding reformers but avoided their errors. His God is the one, the sole, and the timeless being who is the creator, the self-existent, the incomprehensible, and the everlasting. His God is Truth which was before the world began, which is, and which shall endure for ever, as the ultimate cause of all we see and know. Guru Nanak addressed himself to the Mulla and the Pandit, to the Darvesh and the Sannyasi, asking them to remember the Lord who is the creator of numberless Vishnus, Shivas and Muhammads. The only knowledge which avails is the knowledge of God. Only they can find the Lord on whom He looks with favour. To this idea of grace was linked the importance of effort, of good works and right conduct.

Cunningham emphasized that Guru Nanak 'rendered his mission applicable to all times and places', making use of universal truth as his sole instrument. He taught that asceticism or abandonment of the world was unnecessary. He extricated his followers from the accumulated errors of ages, and enjoined upon them devotion of thought and excellence of conduct as the first of duties. He left them,

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 35-37.



erect and free, unbiased in mind and unfettered by rules, to become an increasing body of truthful worshippers'. Cunningham goes on to add that Guru Nanak's reform was only religious and moral 'in its immediate effect', and it is not necessary to suppose that he possessed 'any clear and sagacious views of social amelioration or of political advancement. He left the progress of his people to the operation of time'. He ensured however that his followers did not contract into a sect, and his comprehensive principles did not narrow into monastic distinctions. This he did by nominating Angad as his successor. The Sikhs believe 'the spirit of Nanak to have been incarnate in each succeeding Guru'.<sup>50</sup> Notwithstanding minor inconsistencies, arising out of the great gusto with which he writes, Cunningham's position on the whole is clear: he looked upon Sikhism as a new religion, 'the seal of the double dispensation of Brahma and Muhammad'.<sup>51</sup>

Cunningham was different from his predecessors not only in the use of fresh evidence but also in some of his assumptions. He states, for instance, that 'race and religion are everywhere of greater importance than the accidents of position or the achievements of contemporary genius'. He was unique among the British historians of the Sikhs to ascribe a positive role to religious ideology. He says further that the 'characteristics of race are perhaps more deepseated and enduring than those of religion'.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, he attached great importance to the predominance of Jats in the Sikh Panth. The importance which Cunningham gives to 'race and religion' in human history suggests that he was deeply influenced by the Romantic Movement of the early nineteenth century. He looked upon the emergence of the Sikh nation as the unfolding of a religious ideology. That was also the reason why he prized the Sikh tradition without abandoning the assumption of European superiority over the contemporary world.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 38-43.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 9 & 12.

<sup>53</sup> Note 43, above. For the significance of Cunningham's work in the context of historical writing on the Sikhs, J.S. Grewal, 'The Present State of Sikh Studies', *Miscellaneous Articles*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1974, 153-62.



### III

After the subversion of the kingdom of Lahore in 1849, the civil and military officers of the British empire showed no serious interest in Sikhism, though quite a few of them wrote on the Sikhs. The first British administrator to write on them after Cunningham was Lepel Griffin. The nature of his interest is clearly reflected in the titles of his works: *The Punjab Chiefs* (published in 1865), *The Law of Inheritance to Chiefship as Observed by the Sikhs Previous to the Annexation of Punjab* (published in 1869), and *The Rajas of the Punjab* (published in 1870). The interest of these works is centred in the Sikh rulers, who had become subordinate to the British, and in the former jagirdars of the kingdom of Lahore who were still important in the society. It was with them that the British administrators as rulers of the Punjab had now to deal; information on their present and past therefore was administratively useful. In fact, after the uprising of 1857-58, when the Punjabis provided a crucial support to the British, 'the chiefs and families of note' came to be looked upon as the main prop of colonial rule in the Punjab. If the Sikhs received greater attention, it was only because of their larger proportion in 'the chiefs' and 'the families of note'.

Griffin became the obvious choice for writing on Ranjit Singh in the 'Rulers of India' series. Rather unexpectedly, he decided to treat the Sikh faith in his *Ranjit Singh* published in 1892. His reasoning is interesting. Ranjit Singh's career and character could not be properly understood without an understanding of Sikh theocracy which, in turn, could not be appreciated without an understanding of the Sikh religious system.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, 'a few words on the principles of the creed as expounded by Nanak' became necessary.<sup>55</sup>

Griffin observed that the Sikhs revered the *Adi Granth* 'as a direct revelation' in the same degree as Christians and Muslims regarded their respective scriptures. There was nothing novel or original, however, in the compositions of Guru Nanak to entitle them to greater attention than the compositions of Kabir 'from whom it would seem that Nanak

<sup>54</sup> Sir Lepel Griffin, *Ranjit Singh*, S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1957 (reprint), 39.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.



derived the greater part of his inspiration'. The dogmas of the Adi Granth did not differ appreciably from 'the esoteric teaching of Hinduism in its more ancient and purer form'. Guru Nanak desired to raise Hinduism from the degraded forms of superstition and polytheism. He was 'a reformer in the best and the truest sense of the word'. Sikhism could be placed very high among the philosophical religions of the civilized world because of its 'noble ideal' and its 'practical and social meaning'.<sup>56</sup> In his general view of Sikhism, Griffin relies upon his predecessors, except Cunningham.

For describing the Sikh faith in detail, Griffin summarizes Ernest Trumpp. The main point in the doctrine taught by Guru Nanak, according to Griffin, was the unity of the Supreme Being. Whatever the epithet used for the deity, Guru Nanak's God is incomprehensible, invisible, uncreated, eternal, and alone possessing any real existence. He is the root of all things, the primary cause from which all human beings and all nature have been evolved. 'This doctrine is Pantheism, which in the Granth coexists with an exalted Theism'. On the whole, the teaching of the Granth is that the whole universe emanated from the divine essence. 'Nature apart from God is a shadow, a delusion, and a mirage'. Nevertheless, the more theistic view in the Granth represents God as altogether distinct from the creatures which emanate from Him. Polytheism is discountenanced in the Granth but Guru Nanak did not denounce 'the polytheistic theory' and accepted myriads of inferior deities. He accepted also the Hindu doctrine of transmigration which, in the Granth, is tantamount to 'denial of free will'. Paradoxically, escape from transmigration, promised by the Guru, attracted disciples to his creed.<sup>57</sup> With his better command of the English language, Griffin could be neat in summarizing Trumpp.

Exemption from the common lot of death-and-rebirth could be acquired by invoking the Sacred Name. As in Calvinism so in Sikhism, there was a contradiction between the idea of predestination and the idea of free will. This logical contradiction was resolved in practice by not insisting on either the one or the other. 'Such fatalistic doctrine was not dwelt upon, for the obvious reason that the power of the

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-55.



Guru would diminish in proportion as it was understood that he could not relieve his followers from the burden of destiny, and it was generally taught that by religious exercises and by patient reception of the teaching of the Guru, the heart would be inclined to righteousness and a choice would thus be allowed which might counteract the fatalistic decree which was supreme over human will'. Reverence for the Guru and obedience to him is the 'most important doctrine of the Granth'.<sup>58</sup>

For Griffin, the teaching of Guru Nanak was highly ethical. Besides enjoining the practice of ablution, of giving alms and of abstinence from animal food, Guru Nanak denounced evil-speaking, unchastity, anger, covetousness, selfishness and want of faith. The position of the householder was honourable in the eyes of Guru Nanak and he 'strongly discouraged the idea that any special virtue was to be gained by the ascetic life'. True religion consisted not in the outward ceremonial but in the state of the heart; meditation was possible without retreating to the wilderness or the seclusion of a monastery. From this viewpoint, both the Udasīs and the Akālīs appeared to infringe the teaching of Guru Nanak. The Adi Granth is hostile to Brahmans though Guru Nanak did not directly enjoin the abolition of caste. But he admitted disciples from all castes. The successors of Guru Nanak made little change of any religious or social importance till we come to Guru Gobind Singh 'whose teaching and book of conduct were a new starting-point for the Sikhs and did more than the authority of Nanak to form them into the military nation which they afterwards became'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, in tracing the influence of religious ideas on Sikh theocracy, which influenced the career and character of Ranjit Singh, Griffin was prepared to go back to the times of Guru Gobind Singh but not to the teachings of Guru Nanak. By implication, he did not accept the thesis put forth by J.D. Cunningham.

Griffin refers to only two of his predecessors : J.D. Cunningham and H.H. Wilson. Their accounts of the religion of the Sikhs were 'slight and defective, for the reason that the writers were not acquainted with the Sikh scriptures or the

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 56-58.



commentaries upon them'.<sup>60</sup> Griffin could say this without any fear of contradiction because the first translation of the Sikh scriptures appeared in English only in 1877 in the form of *The Adl Granth* by Ernest Trumpp. Without this work, Griffin would not have been able to say much about the religion of the Sikhs. Probably, he took up the theme of religion in his *Ranjit Singh* for the first time in his writings because of the publication of *The Adl Granth*.

Quite a few administrators wrote on the Sikhs after Lepel Griffin, but none showed any serious interest in the early Sikh tradition. Even a cursory glance at A.H. Bingley's *Sikhs* would reveal that his primary interest was in the recruitment of Sikhs to the British Indian army. His interest in the 'history' or 'religion' of the Sikhs was extremely marginal. In the list of his 'authorities' figure the works of M'Gregor, Cunningham, Trumpp and Griffin, but his short account of the Sikh religion is taken largely from Griffin without quotation marks.<sup>61</sup> John J.H. Gordon in his *Sikhs* refers to the works of Malcolm, M'Gregor, Smyth, Cunningham, Trumpp and Syed Muhammad Latif. He presents Sikhism as a revolt of Guru Nanak against Brahmanical tyranny, and his objective is stated to have been reform and reconciliation of Hinduism and Islam.<sup>62</sup>

The works of Malcolm, Prinsep, Osborne, M'Gregor, Smyth, Cunningham, Trumpp, Griffin and Macauliffe figure in the bibliography of C.H. Payne's *Short History of the Sikhs* published in 1915. His brief account of Guru Nanak and his faith reflects his indebtedness to several of them. For Payne, Guru Nanak did not claim to be the originator of a new faith; he was essentially a reformer who wanted to restore Hinduism to its ancient purity by ridding it of idolatry, superstition and empty ritual. He did not profess to be the founder of a new nation: his purpose was ethical, not political. He believed in one God for all men, and therefore all men were equally His servants; the distinctions of caste were meaningless. Morality held a high place in Guru Nanak's doctrines; without purity

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>61</sup> A.H. Bingley, *Sikhs*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1970 (reprint - first published in 1899), 69-71.

<sup>62</sup> John J.H. Gordon, *The Sikhs*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1970 (reprint - first published in 1904), Preface & 15-18.



of life even faith was unavailing. Men could practise virtue while engaged in the ordinary business of life. This practical element gave vitality to his religious system. Liberation as the final goal meant release from the cycle of transmigration; it could not be attained through merit but the Guru could grant 'exemption' to 'the elect' among his followers.<sup>63</sup>

R.E. Parry, whose *Sikhs of the Punjab* was published in 1921, was primarily interested in recruitment of the Sikhs to the British Indian army. M'Gregor, Cunningham and Macauliffe as well as Bingley figure in his bibliography, but he gives hardly a paragraph to Guru Nanak. Imbued with monotheism, Guru Nanak preached a mild and gentle doctrine: all men are equal in the sight of God who is universal and does not belong to any one religion; men were to live an upright and pure life amidst every-day scenes of business and pleasure.<sup>64</sup> Like Bingley and Gordon, Parry looked upon the Sikhs as 'one of our most loyal Indian sects'.<sup>65</sup> In less than a decade, however, Major A.E. Barstow was not so sure as Parry. Their anti-British agitation in the 1920s made it difficult to understand and appraise the Sikhs. He advised a middle course between overweening trust and undue suspicion. His summary treatment of the Sikh faith carries echoes of Ernest Trumpp.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, G.B. Scott in his *Religion and Short History of the Sikhs*, published in 1930, relied professedly on J.D. Cunningham for the early history and religion of the Sikhs.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> C.H. Payne, *A Short History of the Sikhs*, Punjab Languages Department, Patla, 1970 (reprint), 25-28.

The scope of Payne's *History* is virtually the same as that of Cunningham's. Only a short chapter is added on 'annexation and after', bringing the narrative to the rise of the Singh Sabha movement and the Chief Khalsa Diwan. Payne refers to Cunningham more than to all his other predecessors put together but he does not accept Cunningham's assessment of the faith of Guru Nanak.

<sup>64</sup> R.E. Parry, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1970 (reprint), 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>66</sup> A.E. Barstow, *The Sikhs : An Ethnology*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1985 (reprint - first published in 1928, 1 & 86-91).

<sup>67</sup> George Bailey Scott, *Religion and Short History of the Sikhs, 1469 to 1930*, Punjab Languages Department, Patiala, 1970 (reprint - first published in 1930), 10 & 17-19.

The first half of Scott's short book is based on Cunningham's *History*, or rather on what he thought he had 'learnt' from Cunningham. Only occasionally does Scott refer to anything based on his own observation or independent



## IV

For more significant work on the Sikhs than that of the civil and army officers of the British empire, we have to turn to missionaries and orientalist of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The first important work to appear was Ernest Trumpp's *The Adi Granth*. As he tells us in the preface, he had been entrusted to translate the *Granth* by the India Office towards the end of 1869. However, his knowledge of Sanskrit and the North Indian vernaculars proved to be inadequate for the task, particularly because there existed neither a grammar nor a dictionary of its language at that time. Trumpp decided to seek help from the native scholars. With this idea, he started for the Punjab towards the end of 1870. At Lahore, he engaged two Sikh Granthis. They could give him some traditional explanations but they had no knowledge of the old grammatical forms and obsolete words. The other scholars recommended to Trumpp were no better in his view. But they provided him the clue to three commentaries, two of which explained obsolete words in Hindi and Punjabi and the third explained a number of indigenized Persian and Arabic words. Trumpp was able to prepare a grammar and a dictionary of his own. Having prepared his tools and gone through the entire *Granth* once, he returned to Europe in the spring of 1872. He worked rather intermittently for a few more years to produce a manuscript which was published in 1877.<sup>68</sup>

Trumpp's *Adi Granth* was a monumental work. His translation covers more than 700 octavo pages in print. But he did not translate the whole *Granth*. The reason he gives for his deliberate omissions is interesting: they would have

understanding. The only interesting observation relates to what was regarded by simple minded Sikhs to be the palm impression of Guru Nanak at Hasan Abdal or Panja Sahib: *ibid.*, 19. For him, the Udasis are 'the mournful ones', (obviously from the popular meaning of *udas* current in his own day): *ibid.*, 20. Scott's real concern is Sikh loyalty to the British, particularly that of the Sikhs in the British army. He looks upon movements within the Sikh community from the viewpoint of imperial interests. How to manage the Sikhs as subjects of the British empire is the important question. *ibid.*, especially 87-96.

<sup>68</sup> Ernest Trumpp, *The Adi Granth*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1989 (reprint), v-vii.

added nothing significant to what was selected. The Sikh Granth according to him is 'incoherent and shallow in the extreme'. It was painful for the Europeans to read even a single *Rag*. Therefore, it would have been 'a mere waste of paper to add also the minor Rags, which only repeat, in endless variations, what has already been said in the great Rags over and over again, without adding the least to our knowledge'.<sup>69</sup> Trumpp's translation is regarded as 'crude' by a late twentieth century translator of the *Adi Granth*.<sup>70</sup> Much of this crudity is due to Trumpp's anxiety to be literally accurate in translating even the metaphors. It is difficult to maintain that he understood the original in all its nuances even with the help of the grammar and the dictionary he composed. A part of the difficulty which he ascribes to the original appears to have sprung from his own limitations.<sup>71</sup>

Trumpp did not confine himself to translation. He added five 'introductory essays' of about 140 pages to the translation: one each on the life of Guru Nanak, the lives of the other Sikh Gurus, the religion of the Sikhs, the arrangement of the contents of the *Granth*, and on its language and metres. Thus, the scope of Trumpp's work is much more than that of a translation. His *Adi Granth* may be regarded as the first important attempt at an interpretation of the early Sikh tradition. For the present, however, we shall confine ourselves to his exposition of the Sikh religion which is supposed to be based on his understanding of the *Adi Granth*.<sup>72</sup>

Trumpp collected all the compositions of Guru Nanak at one place to form a sound idea of his tenets. He makes the general statement that Guru Nanak was 'by no means an independent thinker, neither had he any idea of starting a new sect: he followed in all essential points the common

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>70</sup> Gopal Singh, *Sri Guru-Granth Sahib (English Version)*, 4 Vols., Gur Das Kapur & Sons, Delhi, 1960, I, xviii.

<sup>71</sup> McLeod brackets Trumpp with those European scholars who 'distinguished themselves by their capacity for misunderstanding': 'Colonel Steinback and the Sikhs', *The Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. IX, Part 2 (October 1975), 291.

<sup>72</sup> *The Adi Granth*, xcvi. Trumpp looked upon his knowledge of the *Adi Granth* as a great advantage over all earlier writers, none of whom in his view had read the *Granth* personally, not even the Boden Professor H.H. Wilson. Their 'second hand' information, being defective by its very nature, condemned them to labour under mistakes.



Hindu philosophy of those days, and especially his predecessor Kabir 'who was at that time already a popular man in India, and whose writings, which were composed in the vulgar tongue, were accessible to the unlearned masses'. This was not a novel assessment. What is more, it was not based on the compositions of Guru Nanak. Merely the inclusion of Kabir's compositions in the Adī Granth is the argument adduced by Trumpp. Furthermore, Trumpp does not make any distinction between Guru Nanak and his successors in his 'sketch of the Sikh religion'.<sup>73</sup>

Trumpp gives a long exposition of the religious and moral ideas of Guru Nanak. The chief point in his doctrine, according to Trumpp, was the unity of the Supreme Being, but this idea had already been familiarized by the Hindu philosophical systems and the Bhagats like Kabir. The Supreme Being of Guru Nanak is one, though referred to by different names. He alone is really existing, uncreated, endless, timeless and eternal, containing all qualities and yet remaining without qualities at the same time. He is the ground or root of all things, the source from which all have sprung, the primary cause. God is the creator, but he does not create out of nothing. Creation in Sikhism means 'the expansion of the same into a *plurality of forms*'. The creatures consider themselves as individual beings due to the deception of *maya* which the Supreme Being has spread over the whole universe. The world is His *play* or *sport*. There is no teleological principle involved in this conception. The material essence is co-eternal with the spirit. There is a gross pantheism in the Adī Granth which identifies all things with the Absolute. But there is also a fine pantheism which makes a distinction between the Absolute and finite beings and, thus, 'borders frequently on Theism'. The Supreme in its essence is light which, though diffused into all creatures, remains distinct. Trumpp sees a contradiction between gross pantheism and the conception of the Supreme as 'a self-conscious personality'. Though intellectual and moral qualities are attributed to this personality, Trumpp believes that logically there is no room in the system for such qualities.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., xcvi-cl.

Trumpp maintains that, notwithstanding the doctrine of the unity of the Supreme Being, it would be wrong to assume that Guru Nanak forbade the worship of other gods. The popular gods became only less important because Guru Nanak took over the whole Hindu pantheon and subordinated it to the Supreme. Only occasionally is idolatry ridiculed in the Adi Granth. It would also be wrong to assume that Guru Nanak attempted to unite the Hindu and Muslim ideas about God. He remained 'a thorough Hindu'. If Muslims became his followers, it was essentially because Sufism was nothing but pantheism derived from Hindu sources and only outwardly adapted to the forms of Islam. 'On these grounds tolerance between Hindus and Turks is often advocated in the Granth and intolerance on the part of the Turks rebuked'.<sup>75</sup>

As the light emanating from the Absolute, the human soul is immortal. 'Every soul is supposed to have migrated through the eighty-four lakhs of forms of existence, before it reached the human birth; the human birth is therefore considered so valuable, as final emancipation can only be worked out in it'. The aim of human life is to be re-absorbed in the fountain of light from which the human soul emanated. What keeps the human beings bound to the cycle of death-and-rebirth, and therefore to perpetual misery, is the influence of 'the three qualities' (*gunas*) and *maya*. Since only the soul purified from all earthly desires can be re-absorbed in the eternal light, man cannot attain to liberation unless he is freed from the error of duality.

Trumpp brackets Guru Nanak with the *bhaktas* and looks upon their conception of emancipation as a clear proof of the pantheistic character of Sikhism. The Hindus in general and the Bhagats in particular looked upon release from the cycle of transmigration as the supreme aim of human life, and they conceived of this release in terms of 'the total dissolution of individual existence by the reabsorption of the soul in the fountain of light'. This aim is no different from the Buddhist *nirvan*, and this for Trumpp is the final proof of 'the pantheistic character of the tenets of the Sikh Gurus'.<sup>76</sup>

However, though the ideal was old, the means were new.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., ci-cii.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., cii-cvi.



The Bhagats took upon themselves 'to show the way to Nirban, as Buddha in his time had promised, and find eager listeners; the difference is only in the *means* which these Bhagats propose, for obtaining the desired end'. Guru Nanak too announced that *the name of Hari* was the only means of final emancipation in the *kaliyuga*. The name of Hari is the universal medicine for mankind; whoever mutters it, is saved in a moment'. But this could make the Guru superfluous, according to Trumpp. Therefore, the Sikh Gurus took good care to underline that the Name could be obtained only from the true Guru who alone 'can bestow the right initiation and communicate the mantra of the name of Hari'. Trumpp looks upon the concept of *nam* in terms of muttering the *mantra*. Furthermore, he thinks that renunciation, austerities, bathing at sacred places, and giving of alms are not denied to be meritorious acts; only they are insufficient for gaining complete emancipation. In Trumpp's exposition, emancipation is restricted to the elect who are chosen not according to their meritorious acts but according to the pleasure of Hari. Trumpp draws the conclusion that the emancipation of the elect also belongs to the category of 'sport' of the Supreme Being. Strict predetermination, however, is mitigated by the contradictory idea that men have the free-will to come to the Guru.<sup>77</sup>

Trumpp expected Guru Nanak to put forth the claim that he was the true Guru, but there is no trace of this kind of a claim in the Adi Granth. His successors too give no proof of his being the true Guru. But they appeal to his authority and underline the importance of the Guru : he is 'the only infallible guide to complete emancipation; he is the *mediator* between Hari and mankind, without whom nobody can become acceptable at the divine threshold; he is the boat, that carries men over the water of existence; yea, he is the very fulness of Hari himself'. The disciple had to render complete submission to the Guru who possessed the magical power of changing the personality of the discipline, like the philosopher's stone which transmutes everything into gold. However, the actual teaching imparted by the Guru in the Adi Granth for effecting final emancipation can be 'contained in a few meagre sentences'. In fact there are only three

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., cviii.



injunctions: muttering the name of Hari, singing his praises, and getting rid of the 'I'. The pantheistic 'I am that, I am identical with the Supreme' is the culmination of the Guru's teaching. Lastly, there is the possibility of obtaining emancipation 'whilst being yet in the body'.<sup>78</sup>

According to Trumpp, it was wrong to look upon Sikhism as a 'moralising Deism' because in a pantheistic system there is no room for inculcating moral duties. Nevertheless, he enumerates the moral duties enjoined upon Sikhs: obedience to the Guru, service of the saints, remembering the name and giving alms and practising ablutions (*nam, dan, isnan*), abstaining from falsehood and slander, not looking on another's wife, purifying the heart from the five vices: lust, wrath, greediness, infatuation and egotism (*kam, krodh, lobh, moh, hankar*). Charity to animals is frequently inculcated in the *Adi Granth* but only on pantheistic grounds. No peculiar sanctity is attached to the cow, but abstinence from animal food is inculcated. Prayer to the Guru but not to the Supreme is frequently mentioned. In due course, the Guru in Sikhism came to be identified with God. 'Life, property and honour were sacrificed to the Guru in a way which is often revolting to our moral feelings'. Trumpp is inclined to believe that the abolition of Guruship by Guru Gobind Singh was good for a free and moral development of the Sikh community. The Sikhs did not become a narrow-minded sect of *faqirs* and developed instead into a political commonwealth because of the sound principle of Guru Nanak that, for emancipation, there was no need to abandon secular occupation.<sup>79</sup>

The goal of emancipation was not confined to the higher castes; it was made accessible to all men, even to the *chandals*. Guru Nanak received all men as his disciples without any regard to caste, recognizing in all the dignity of the human kind. However, he did not assail the institution of caste directly. It was left for Guru Gobind Singh to abolish caste altogether for his Khalsa. Though the teaching of the Brahmans and the authority of the Vedas and Puranas was often reproved, the dignity of the Brahmans as family priests was left untouched by Guru Nanak and his eight successors.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., cviii-clx.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., clx-cxi.



Once again it was left for Guru Gobind Singh to prohibit the employment of Brahmans in any capacity.<sup>80</sup>

The first serious criticism of Trumpp came from Frederic Pincott. In a special article contributed to *The Dictionary of Islam* he argued against 'the able translator of the *Adi Granth*'.<sup>81</sup> Trumpp's opinion that Sikhism had 'only an accidental relationship' with Islam was not acceptable to Pincott. In his view the religion of Guru Nanak was really intended as 'a compromise between Hinduism and Muhammadanism'. Pincott in fact goes on to state that Sikhism could be spoken of as 'a religion of a Muhammadan sect'.<sup>82</sup> Trumpp's idea that Sufism was of Indian origin was factually incorrect. Sufism was brought to India by the Persianized Turks. It had found its classic expression in the works of Firdausi, Nizami, Sadi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Hafiz and Jami. The doctrines preached by the Sikh Gurus were 'distinctly sufistic' and the early Gurus assumed the manners and dress of *faqirs*, 'thus plainly announcing their connection with the Sufistic side of Muhammadanism'.<sup>83</sup>

Pincott tries to establish a close link between Sufism and Sikhism on the basis of several other points: small rosaries in the hands of the Gurus in their pictures 'as though ready to perform *zikr*'; pantheistic denial of all other than God in the *Jap-ji* of Guru Nanak and the poetry of Jami; the common metaphors of 'light' and 'the beloved'; the rhyming short compositions of the Gurus with the use of the pen-name Nanak resembling the *ghazals* of the Persian poets; Guru Nanak's close association with Muslims; the expression 'there is no Hindu, there is no Musalman'; inclusion of Shaikh Farid's compositions in the *Adi Granth*; Guru Nanak's

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., cxi-cxli.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Patrick Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam (Being a Cyclopaedia of the Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs, together with the Technical and Theological Terms, of the Muhammadan)*, Premier Book House, Lahore, 1984 (reprint - first published in 1885), 583. The special status of the article is acknowledged by the editor in his preface to the *Dictionary*.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 594. Apart from the *Adi Granth* of Trumpp and Sardar Attar Singh of Bhadaur's *Travels of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh*, Pincott claims to have used Sardha Ram's *Sikhan de Raj di Vithia*, in Punjabi, the text of the *Granth Sahib*, the *Janamsakhis* numbered I.O. MS No. 1728 and I.O. MS 2885, Pandit Gyan Sant Singh's *Sri Guru Charitra Prabhakar*, Bhai Santokh Singh's *Sri Nanak Prakash* and his *Sri Granth Gur-Pratap Suraj Rasa*.

<sup>83</sup> *Dictionary*, 584-85.



pilgrimage to Mecca; the tradition that both Hindus and Muslims claimed him as their own after his death; the tradition that at his birth the Hindus said that he was some *devta* and the Muslims said he was a *sadiq* of Khuda.<sup>84</sup> In citing the evidence of the *janamsakhis*, Pincott underlines that their factual accuracy was of no crucial importance for his argument because the followers of Guru Nanak thought of the situations depicted as conceivable.<sup>85</sup> In his view, it was Guru Nanak's settled intention to do away with the differences between Islam and Hinduism 'by instituting a third course which should supersede both of them'.<sup>86</sup>

At the same time Pincott emphasizes that Guru Nanak never openly seceded from the pale of Hinduism. In fact in some of the *sakhis* it is explicitly stated that he was 'a Hindu'. Nevertheless, he struck a heavy blow on Hinduism by his rejection of caste distinctions; he admitted men of all castes to his fraternity. Guru Nanak was not fastidious in using epithets for God, but the most common name was Hari. The chief point of his teaching was the unity of God. He set himself firmly against the idea of associating any other being with God. This enabled him to treat the crowd of Hindu deities with indifference, reducing the whole cluster to the position of angels in Christianity who sink into utter insignificance compared with the central idea of the Divine Majesty. The phenomenal world is the manifestation of God and the idea of severalty exists due to pure deception. Notwithstanding this conception, God is spoken of as different from His creatures. The soul of man in its natural state is sinless, but it is deluded into egotism and duality due to *maya*. The chain of births and deaths is not broken until the delusion is removed. The belief in metempsychosis is thus seen to be necessary complement to pantheism; and it is essential to the creed of a Hindu, a Buddhist, and a Sufi'.<sup>87</sup>

In Sikhism, as in Buddhism, the prime object of attainment is the total cessation of individual existence, arising out of the recognition of the complete identity of the human soul with the Supreme. In Sikhism, however, the pantheistic idea of

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 585-87.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 585-89.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 586 & 588.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 589-90.



'absolute substance' gradually changed into the notion of a self-conscious Supreme Being, the creator and governor of the universe. This change, in Pincott's view, was due to the influence of Islam. In moulding the thoughts of the founder of Sikhism, certain surviving relics of Buddhism too had a share, notably the Sikh institution of the Sangat and the concept of *nirvan*. In the final analysis, Sikhism 'is based on Hinduism, modified by Buddhism, and stirred into new life by Sufism'. Guru Nanak laboured earnestly to reconcile Hinduism and Islam by insisting on the common features of the two systems and minimizing the differences. He did succeed in effecting 'a large amount of reconciliation, and left behind him a system designed to carry on the good work'. The reversal of this process which resulted in 'the deadliest of feuds' between Sikhs and Muslims came later. It was due as much to political causes as to 'a steady departure from the teachings of the Founder of Sikhism'.<sup>88</sup>

Pincott returned to the subject of Sikhism about fifteen years later.<sup>89</sup> He placed Guru Nanak in his historical context, more or less as J.D. Cunningham had done in his *History of the Sikhs*, referring to the beginnings in nature-worship, the philosophy of Vedanta, the rise of Buddhism, the revival of Brahmanism, the advent of Islam in northern India, the peculiar position of the Punjab in terms of its geographical location and cultural development, the reform introduced by Ramanand, Gorakhnath, and Kabir.<sup>90</sup> According to Pincott, Guru Nanak clearly perceived the errors of his predecessors and had the boldness to proclaim the truth, even against the opposition of the prejudiced and the interested, whether exalted or humble. His principles can be reduced to a single formula: 'the Unity of God and the Brotherhood of man'. For him, there was only one God, not in the likeness of man like Rama, nor a creature of attributes and passions like the Allah of the Prophet of Islam, but one, sole, indivisible, self-existent, incomprehensible, timeless and all-pervading creator and sustainer of the phenomenal world.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 590-91.

<sup>89</sup> 'Sikhism', *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, 70-83. Pincott's article had first appeared in *Religious Systems of the World: A Contribution to the Study of Comparative Religion*, New York, 1901.

<sup>90</sup> *The Sikh Religion: A Symposium*, 70-73.



Guru Nanak's conception of God 'levelled all distinctions of creed and caste', and the great truth of the brotherhood of man swept away 'the barriers of nation, tribe and station'. There are echoes of Cunningham in Pincott's characterization of Sikhism. 'Nanak taught that all men are equal before God; that there is no high, no low, no dark, no fair, no privileged, no outcaste; all are equal both in race and in creed, in political rights and in religious aspirations'. Furthermore, the practical application of Guru Nanak's doctrines of God and man 'led to the formation of new nationality'. Though he repeats some of the points made earlier in the *Dictionary of Islam*, Pincott now came to believe that the mixture of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic ideas in Guru Nanak's faith gave it only its subordinate or minor features.<sup>91</sup>

A much more thorough and impressive negation of Trumpp's interpretation of early Sikh tradition came from Max Arthur Macauliffe. As he tells us in his preface to *The Sikh Religion*, he was engaged in judicial duties in India until 1893 when he was approached by some Sikh societies to undertake a translation of their sacred works. They knew of his appreciative attitude towards Sikh literature, while they were unhappy with Trumpp's work. Macauliffe acceded to their request and resigned his appointment to devote all his time to the task as a labour of love. One of his professed objects was 'to make some reparation' to the Sikhs for the insults which Trumpp had offered to their Gurus and their religion. In Macauliffe's view, Trumpp's translation of a portion of the Granth was 'highly inaccurate and unidiomatic'. Moreover, he had given mortal offence to the Sikhs by the *odium theologicum* he introduced into his work. 'Whenever he saw an opportunity of defaming the Gurus, the sacred book, and the religion of the Sikhs, he eagerly availed himself of it'.<sup>92</sup>

The undertaking was important in Macauliffe's view for other reasons too. A knowledge of the excellence of the religion of the Sikhs would enhance their prestige in the world, which would be to their political advantage. The

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 73-76.

<sup>92</sup> Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writings And Authors*, S. Chand & Company, New Delhi, 1983 (second reprint- originally published by the Clarendon Press in six volumes in 1909), I, Preface, vii.



English knowing Sikhs, who have no time to study their scriptures in the original, would get acquainted with their religion through an English translation. The professional interpreters of the Sikh scriptures were dying out, and it would soon become impossible to understand them. The language itself was undergoing change, and it was well therefore to fix the translation of many exceedingly difficult passages for the benefit of future generations. Lastly, the local legends which were available at that time would pass into oblivion.<sup>93</sup> Macauliffe believed that his work was bound to throw some light on the state of society in the middle ages, which would make it useful for 'the student of comparative theology'.<sup>94</sup> In any case, he felt that it was a question of now or never.<sup>95</sup>

There was yet another consideration which was important for Macauliffe, more important perhaps than all the others. The Sikh religion could bring some advantages to the colonial state. The prophecy attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, for instance, that Europeans coming from beyond the seas would tear down the Mughal empire became the cause of Sikh support to the British in their assault on Delhi in 1857. Similarly, the prophecy attributed to Guru Gobind Singh that the English, with the support of the Sikhs, would establish great empire to ensure wealth, religion, learning and happiness in every home, was relevant for the brave Sikhs becoming 'the most loyal and devoted subjects of the British Crown'.<sup>96</sup> At any rate, it seemed politic to Macauliffe 'to place before the Sikh soldiery their Guru's prophecies in favour of the English' as well as 'the texts of their sacred writings which foster their loyalty'.

In the on-going tussle between the Arya Samajis and the Singh Sabhas, Macauliffe naturally sided with the latter. The movement to treat the Sikhs as Hindus, in Macauliffe's view, was in direct opposition to the teaching of the Gurus. The Sikhs must retain their distinct identity.<sup>97</sup> In fact, he advocated that Punjabi should be recognized as 'an official or optional official language' in the Punjab so that 'the

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., vii-viii.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., xxi-xxii.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., xxxii.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., xviii-xix.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., xxi.

exalted ethical instruction of the Granth Sahib' remained accessible to the Punjabis in the original.<sup>98</sup> Macauliffe felt happy over the military authorities in British India not bothering about 'religious neutrality' and insisting that Sikh recruits receive baptism according to the rites prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh. Thereby, the Sikh recruits became the main guardians of the Sikh religion.<sup>99</sup> Unlike Islam and Christianity, Sikhism appeared to Macauliffe to be one of those religions which cannot survive without the support of the state. He feared that 'without State support Sikhism will also be lost in the great chaos of Indian religious system'.<sup>100</sup> He concludes his Introduction with the sentence: 'I am not without hope that when enlightened rulers become acquainted with the merits of the Sikh religion they will not willingly let it perish in the great abyss in which so many creeds have been engulfed'.<sup>101</sup>

Macauliffe's political concern determined his approach to the Sikh scriptures. If the idea was to make some reparation to the Sikhs, it was necessary to consult their representatives and, as far as possible, to seek their informal approval. Therefore he submitted every line of his work to the most searching criticism of learned Sikhs through either rough printed proofs or typed copies.<sup>102</sup> He acknowledges his debt to Bhai Bhagwan Singh of Patiala, Giani Ditt Singh to Lahore, Bhai Sardul Singh of Amritsar, and Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha who was 'one of the greatest scholars and most distinguished authors among the Sikhs'.<sup>103</sup> Macauliffe quotes from the communications he received in appreciation of his work from eminent *gianis*, Sir Baba Khem Singh, Baba Sumer Singh of Patna and Giani Hazara Singh. He gives an extract from *The Khalsa* and translation of the address presented to him by the Singh Sabha of Amritsar carrying the implication of approval for his work.<sup>104</sup>

Macauliffe was aware of the Sikh belief that the Granth Sahib should be regarded as the embodiment of their Gurus

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., xxiv-xxv.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., xxv.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Introduction, iv-lvi.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., lxxxviii.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., lx.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., xxix-xxx.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., lx-xlv.



'who are regarded as only one person'. Many of his Sikh friends did not like the idea that the entire Granth should be translated and printed in the order of the original, because it would not receive the same respect and attention in foreign countries as in India. Their fears came as a great relief to Macauliffe because his intention was not to translate the whole Granth and not to present the translation in the order of the original. He wanted to intersperse many of the sacred hymns in the biographical accounts of the Gurus. Furthermore, he wanted to avoid repetition, just as Trumpp had done before him. But he gives a different reason. The Gurus had to say the same thing again and again since they were addressing an audience. In a printed work, however, repetition was superfluous. Following the advice of the most learned Sikh scholars, Macauliffe decided to give the substance of the Sikh sacred writings in translation, leaving out nothing that was 'necessary to faith or morals' but not covering the entire Granth.<sup>105</sup>

Macauliffe emphasized that of all the major religions of the world the Sikh religion possessed the most authentic scriptures. Indeed, the very authenticity of its scriptures, paradoxically, militated against its general acceptance, because their teachings could not be modified to suit aspirations of different times and places. Furthermore, Macauliffe found it difficult to 'point to a religion of greater originality'.<sup>106</sup> The unity of God in Sikhism was conceived in such a way that it stood distinguished from both the semitic and the Indian tradition. Unlike Trumpp, Macauliffe underlined the theism rather than pantheism in Sikhism. His conception of *nirvan* in Sikhism was not different from that of Trumpp but, unlike Trumpp, he believed that the Sikh religion was exceptionally ethical.<sup>107</sup> It prohibited idolatry, pilgrimages to sacred rivers and tanks of the Hindus, hypocrisy, slander, tobacco-smoking, the use of wine and other intoxicants, the immurement of women, infanticide, the concremation of widows, and caste exclusiveness; it inculcated truth, honesty, philanthropy, justice, impartiality, gratitude and loyalty.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, i-ii, lvii-lxix & lv.



and 'all the moral and domestic virtues known to the holiest citizen of any country'.<sup>108</sup>

Macauliffe subscribed to the idea that new religions arise 'at periods of great political or social depression'. In any case, the social and political conditions of India during the fifteenth century were relevant for the rise of Sikhism. The Gurus too appear to have been of the opinion, says Macauliffe, that God sends a divine guide whenever required by 'the condition of the age and country'.<sup>109</sup> During the 'Muslim' conquest of India, several events occurred to force the Hindus to consider life in a serious aspect. In several pages Macauliffe refers to what he regards as the instances of repression and persecution from the time of Shihabuddin Ghuri to that of Aurangzeb, including the execution of Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and the sons of Guru Gobind Singh.<sup>110</sup> Here too, Macauliffe's presentation was in conformity with the Sikh tradition.

Macauliffe's interpretation of Sikhism was reinforced by Dorothy Field in her *Religion of the Sikhs*, published in 1914 in 'the wisdom of the east series' meant to promote understanding and good-will between the old world of thought and the new world of action, that is, the East and the West.<sup>111</sup> Dorothy Field was aware of the contemporary controversy about whether or not Sikhs were Hindu. A reading of the Granth, in Macauliffe's translation, strongly suggested to her that 'Sikhism should be regarded as a new and separate world religion, rather than as a reformed sect of the Hindus'.<sup>112</sup> Acknowledging her great debt to Macauliffe, Dorothy Field can occasionally bring in ideas expressed by some other writers, not easy to reconcile with one another. The pure and lofty monotheism of the Sikhs was the result of an attempt to reform and to simplify Islam and Hinduism; though this attempt failed, it nonetheless succeeded in binding together a whole race in a new bond of religious zeal, and the Sikhs became a nation by reason of their faith.<sup>113</sup> Guru Nanak assumed a critical attitude towards the three cardinal pillars

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, xx-xxii & xxiii.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, xli-xlix.

<sup>111</sup> Dorothy Field, *The Religion of the Sikhs*, London, 1914, Editorial Note. In her 'acknowledgement' figures the name only of Macauliffe: *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



of Hinduism : the priesthood, the caste system, and the Vedas. He was nevertheless a spiritual descendant of monotheistic reformers within Hinduism. At the same time, Islamic influences caused him to break away very much more from the older faith.<sup>114</sup> However, 'we must be careful not to attribute the Sikh doctrine of Divine Unity solely to the influence of Muhammadanism, for such doctrine had always been present within Hinduism'.<sup>115</sup> Yet, 'however much he may have borrowed in the matter of doctrine, his religion remains distinct and complete in itself, and is not in any way dependent on association with Hinduism'.<sup>116</sup> Though she makes many contradictory statements, Dorothy Field's presentation of Sikhism remains close to Macauliffe's.

In her brief account of the Sikh Gurus, Dorothy Field does not forget to include the supposed prophecies of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh in favour of the English.<sup>117</sup> She favours the idea of preserving Sikh distinctiveness, and looks upon Sikhism as 'essentially a practical religion'. From this point of view indeed, 'it would rank almost first in the world'. Of no other religion could it be said that it made a nation in so short a time as Sikhism. It was little short of a miracle that this faith transformed the outcaste Indian into 'a fine and loyal warrior'. This should interest the Englishmen 'who have so largely reaped the benefits of this grand faith'.<sup>118</sup> Dorothy Field is paraphrasing Macauliffe here.

In her discussion of the doctrines of Sikhism too Dorothy Field virtually repeats Macauliffe. Sikhism lays most stress on the unity and omnipotence of God; His orders are absolutely binding and His ways are not to be questioned. The idea of incarnation is discarded in Sikhism, though the existence of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva is admitted, together with a large number of demigods, in a manner that does not compromise monotheism in any way. God's transcendence is combined with a firm belief in the indwelling and all-pervading spirit. But God remains 'a being distinct from the world'. Similarly, the theories of Karma, Transmigration, Maya and Nirvan

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 28-31.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

were presented by Guru Nanak in a modified form. In the new way of liberation proclaimed by him, the first essential was 'a true Guru'. This true Guru was no other than Guru Nanak whose Guru was God Himself. He thus claimed direct revelation from God. The Name, uttered with meditation, was declared to be the best form of worship, making all the current rituals and rites irrelevant for emancipation. God's praises sung in the company of saints came next to meditation on the Name. Much stress was laid on all ethical virtues. The principle motives, however, were 'the love of God and the love of man'. In social terms, the message of the Gurus abolished the caste prejudices, improved the position of women, and encouraged monogamy. To summarize Sikh ethics, Dorothy Field actually quotes a paragraph from Macauliffe.<sup>119</sup>

## V

Towards the end of colonial rule in India, two Christian missionaries published their studies of the Sikhs: John Clark Archer and C. H. Loehlin. Both of them had resided in the Punjab and come into contact with Sikhs. They were both associated with an educational institution, the Baring Union Christian College at Batala. Their work appeared in 1946 : *The Sikhs in relation to Hindus, Moslems, Christians, and Ahmadis* by Archer and *The Sikhs and their Book* by Loehlin. Only Loehlin continued to work in the field of Sikh studies after 1947.

To assess the message of Guru Nanak, Archer chose the *Japuji*, of which he gives his own translation in order to convey to the English reader the spirit of the original composition. For him, it is Guru Nanak's own peculiar contribution, and a worthy one at that, to the altogether vast and miscellaneous literature of Indian religion. Archer goes on to demonstrate how Guru Nanak imparted new significance to familiar terms. For example, *jap* for Guru Nanak did not mean counting of beads but inward repetition of the Name. Even this would have bracketed him with the *bhaktas*. But the Name for Guru Nanak did not mean Rama and Krishna,

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 44-60.



as it did for the Vaishnava *bhaktas*. 'His Name was higher than the high, its truth the ultimate beyond any wisdom of the Vedas or the Koran'. The profession and the comprehension of the Name was 'itself rewarding'; no ritual or asceticism was needed, nor was any pilgrimage to be undertaken. Furthermore, the True Name freed the devotee from the control of *karma* and from the round of transmigration. God gives liberally to those who ask; the karmic determination is qualified by God's grace.<sup>120</sup>

The *Japuji* of Guru Nanak appears to Archer to propose the superiority of the 'way of truth'. It is superior not only to the way of knowledge or the way of action but also to the way of *bhakti*. The *bhakti-marga* is the true way but only if pursued in the true Name. Guru Nanak proposed, even though not deliberately, 'a fourth way of salvation, more instrumental and effective than any one or all of the other three'. Archer is absolutely clear that Sikhism has to be regarded as a new path, a new faith, a new religion.<sup>121</sup>

Loehlin's *The Sikhs and Their Scriptures* is an extended version of *The Sikhs and their Book* published in 1946.<sup>122</sup> He refers to the environment of tyranny in which Guru Nanak attempted a reconciliation of the two warring communities 'to form a new brotherhood'.<sup>123</sup> He founded the Sikh faith 'by preaching a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam'.<sup>124</sup> Loehlin found it somewhat confusing that the Sikhs do not have one but two *Granth*s.<sup>125</sup> He believes nevertheless that the religion of the Sikhs, like Christianity, is a religion of grace.<sup>126</sup> However, the clue to an understanding of Sikhism lies essentially in *Bhakti*. Loehlin refers to Ramanand's influence on Tulsi Das and on the sects springing from the teaching of Ramanand's great disciple Kabir, including that of the Sikh

<sup>120</sup> J.C. Archer, *The Sikhs*, Princeton University Press, 1946, 108.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-19 & 133. In the Preface, Archer repeats the idea that Sikhism was initially meant to reconcile Hinduism and Islam, but failed to achieve this objective. However, this failure was a kind of success, because Sikhism developed as a separate faith due to this failure.

<sup>122</sup> C.H. Loehlin, *The Sikhs and their Scriptures*, Lucknow Publishing House, Lucknow, 1958 (a new edition was brought out in 1964).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 & 4.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

Gurus.<sup>127</sup> Like Kabir, Guru Nanak represented the Bhakti tradition, a tradition which in Loehlin's view was meant 'to synthesize Hinduism and Islam'.<sup>128</sup> Loehlin tends to equate Islam with Sufism in this context. 'It would indeed be strange if two intermingling faiths of pantheistic and mystical tendencies had not merged and fused at many points, — the more so, in view of the avowed purpose of the first Gurus to form a synthesis of Hinduism and Islam, and unite their followers in an intermediate religion. Sufism offered Bhakti Hinduism a congenial field of contact for this fusion'.<sup>129</sup>

Notwithstanding Loehlin's concern with the Sikh scriptures, his ideas on Sikhism are not based on them. He appears to repeat the ideas of his predecessors, among whom are listed Prinsep, Cunningham, Trumpp, Macauliffe and Archer. He relies on Malcolm too in support of his equation of Guru Nanak with Kabir. There are echoes of Pincott in Loehlin's work, though Pincott is not mentioned by name anywhere.<sup>130</sup> An interesting feature of Loehlin's book is a 'table' in which he lists 'some possible adaptations' from Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism, indicating also 'rejections' and 'differences'.<sup>131</sup>

According to Loehlin, Guru Nanak rejected the Vedas and other scriptures, priesthood of the Brahmans, caste, idolatry, pilgrimages, asceticism, *ahimsa*, and animal sacrifice but he retained pantheism, *karma*, transmigration, *maya*, necessity of the Guru, repetition of the Name, *bhakti*, and salvation by grace. From Islam, Guru Nanak took the idea of One Absolute God, theocracy, repetition of God's name, fatalism, hatred of idolatry, a central shrine and daily prayers. The difference of Sikhism with Christianity related to ten Gurus instead of one Perfect Guru, baptism only of adults, no special recurring day of worship like Sunday, set prayers for every day, and physical symbols. Nevertheless, Loehlin thinks that several ideas and practices could have possibly come from Christianity: salvation by grace, lay readers of scriptures, reality of sin and need of forgiveness, sacrifice in service, baptism and the

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 59. For echoes of Pincott, *ibid.*, 60-63.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., Table III.



communion meal, congregational hymn singing and worship by all men and women and children, and organization of local congregations. At the same time Loehlin thinks that congregational worship could have been taken from Buddhism. This comprehensive cataloguing does not relate to the position of Guru Nanak alone; it covers nearly the whole of the Sikh tradition. This telescoping does not clarify the issues any more than Loehlin's text. It is nonetheless interesting that some Sikh scholars look upon Loehlin's work as 'an objective study' and 'an admirable introduction' to the subject.<sup>132</sup>

Far more impressive than the work of Archer and Loehlin is the work of W.H. McLeod who too was associated with the Baring Union Christian College at Batala. An important purpose of his *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1968, was to provide a systematic statement of Guru Nanak's teachings.<sup>133</sup> A thorough study of his compositions was the basic minimum requirement of such a project.<sup>134</sup> McLeod takes into account the entire range of Guru Nanak's compositions to make the most comprehensive and consistent statement in the English language on the teachings of the founder of Sikhism.

The teachings of Guru Nanak are discussed by McLeod in terms of the nature of God, the nature of unregenerate man, the divine self-expression, and the discipline. The figure 1 at the very beginning of the *mul mantra* declares the unity of God. In His primal aspect God is *nirguna* – absolute, unconditioned, devoid of all attributes; and He is unknowable, completely beyond the range of human comprehension. However, of His own volition, He became *saguna* in order that man might know Him. He is the creator of the universe and all that is therein. He is a participant in the life of the universe, watching, directing and upholding it as the sustainer. He is also the destroyer and the recreator. God is the sovereign Lord, the wielder of absolute authority, the possessor of unqualified power. He is eternal, without beginning, beyond time, unborn, non-incarnated. He is formless (*nirankar*). He is boundless and infinite; He is ineffable. God

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Foreword; also the Foreword to the edition of 1964.

<sup>133</sup> W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968, vii & viii.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 147.



is also immanent in the universe; He is everywhere and in everything. He is the bestower of liberation; He unites the worshipper with Himself through His grace. The response of Guru Nanak to his omnipotent and omnipresent God is that of 'adoring praise'.<sup>135</sup>

The unregenerate man has a *man* (heart, soul and mind all rolled into one) which is erratic and leads him into worldly attachments. The *man* of such a man is controlled by *haumai*, the source of pride and the epitomy of self-centredness. He is *manmukh*, subject to the wayward impulses of his *man*. The outward expressions of a *man* dominated by *haumai* are the evil passions and by this fruit the *manmukh* is to be known. Because of these evil passions the unregenerate man remains sunk in *maya*, seeking fulfilment in attachment to worldly things. For Guru Nanak the world is real but impermanent, or 'false'; *maya* is basically untruth as opposed to Truth. So long as man remains entangled in *maya* it is impossible for him to appropriate Truth. He remains chained to the wheel of death and rebirth, in perpetual separation from God.<sup>136</sup>

When we proceed to inquire 'precisely how God communicates with man', we encounter the specific contribution of Guru Nanak, 'a contribution which offers the most significant example of his positive originality'. The reference here is to the concept of the divine self-expression in the compositions of Guru Nanak. The first key word is *Shabad* or the Word; it is the vehicle of revelation. The Word embraces all that is Truth, all that expresses the nature of God and the means of attaining Him, and this may be perceived in the divine laws governing the universe as well as in the ineffable mystical experience. If the Word appears distinctly as the medium of communication, the Name (*nam*) is the object of communication. The communicator of divine Truth is the Divine Preceptor (*Guru*), equated with God, the voice of God within man, and with the Word. In the thought of Guru Nanak, *Hukam* signifies the divinely instituted and maintained principle governing the existence and movement of the universe. This Divine Order is expressed also in the moral world. The *Hukam* is thus an all-embracing principle,

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 163-77.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 177-89.



'the sum total of all divinely instituted laws; and it is a revelation of the nature of God'. The fifth key word is *sach* or Truth which when appropriated brings liberation. In the last analysis, however, liberation depends on God's grace (*nadar*). Without His grace man does not understand the Word, and there is nothing he can do to earn grace.<sup>137</sup>

To appropriate the salvation which is offered to man by the Guru in the Word, the individual has to strive to cleanse himself of all evil. Inward devotion of a specific kind leads the way to salvation. True religion is to be found not in external practices, but in the inward disciplines of love, faith, mercy, and humility, expressed in righteous and compassionate deeds and in the upholding of all that is true. Loving devotion directed to the formless God is to be expressed in *nam simran* and fear of God. Meditation on the nature and qualities of God is the core of Guru Nanak's religious discipline, a meditation which must overflow in words and deeds. This meditation had a corporate as well as individual application. From this meditation results the experience of *visamad* which, in turn, becomes a stimulus to more exalted meditation. This experience involves wonder and ecstasy. With the ever-widening *visamad* goes a developing sense of joy and peace. 'It is a path leading onward and upward. The accent is strongly upon ascent to higher and yet higher levels of understanding and experience, an accent which is particularly evident in Guru Nanak's famous figure of the five *khands*'. The fifth and the final stage is *Sach Khand*, the Realm of Truth, the true dwelling place of the Formless One, the goal, the ultimate end and purpose of human existence, the final consummation of man's ascent to God. The blending of light with the Light brings a condition of peace, of consummate joy and perfect tranquility, a condition transcending all human telling.<sup>138</sup>

Professor McLeod states at the outset that Sikhism is 'a religion of refined and noble quality'. Like all religious systems, it has antecedents which defy ultimate scrutiny. Guru Nanak did receive an inheritance, but to regard him as the mere mediator of other men's ideas would be 'altogether

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 205-24.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 207-26.

mistaken'. 'In his hands the inheritance was transformed. Moreover the pattern which was produced by this transformation has endured. There have been subsequent developments of considerable significance, but this same pattern has remained the core and essence of the continuing Sikh faith'.<sup>139</sup> In his discussion of the teachings of Guru Nanak, McLeod equates Kabir and Guru Nanak in so far as they both offer syntheses, but in each case 'the nature of the synthesis reflects the personality of its author'. In ensuring endurance for Sikhism, the clarity and coherence of Guru Nanak's thought as much as the designation of a successor 'have been factors of fundamental significance'. However, his thought is closely related to that of the Sant tradition of Northern India.<sup>140</sup>

In the traditional religions of India, according to Professor McLeod, external authority and conventional ceremony constituted the essence, except in three dissenting movements: *bhakti* in Vaishnavism, Hatha Yoga in Shaivism, and Sufism in Islam. 'The Sant tradition was essentially a synthesis of the three principal dissenting movements, a compound of elements drawn mainly from Vaishnava Bhakti and the *hatha-yoga* of the Nath yogis, with a marginal contribution from Sufism'. The Sants expressed their beliefs in a language which was closely related to that of the common people, as in the case of Namdev, Raidas and Kabir, all of whom came from the low caste groups. This Sant tradition was by far the most important element which Guru Nanak inherited from his past or absorbed from contemporary patterns. However, like Kabir, he reinterpreted this tradition in the light of his own experience and in accordance with his own personality.<sup>141</sup> McLeod argues in some detail that Islamic influence on Guru Nanak was not of fundamental significance. Indeed, it was mediated to him through the Sant synthesis, rather than directly. It follows, therefore, that Guru Nanak's synthesis was not meant to reconcile Hindu belief and Islam. Conventional Hindu belief and Islam were 'not regarded as fundamentally right but as fundamentally wrong'.<sup>142</sup> Professor

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 149-51.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 151-57.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 158-61.



McLeod draws the final conclusion in the following words:<sup>143</sup>

It is accordingly incorrect to interpret the religion of Guru Nanak as a synthesis of Hindu belief and Islam. It is indeed a synthesis, but one in which Islamic elements are relatively unimportant. The pattern evolved by Guru Nanak is a reworking of the Sant synthesis, one which does not depart far from Sant sources as far as its fundamental components are concerned. The categories employed by Guru Nanak are the categories of the Sants, the terminology he uses is their terminology, and the doctrines he affirms are their doctrines. This is not to suggest, however, that Guru Nanak's thought was a precise copy of what earlier Sants had developed. He inherited the components of his thought from the Sants, but he did not transmit his inheritance unchanged. He received a synthesis and he passed it on, but he did so in a form which was in some measure amplified, and in considerable measure clarified and integrated. This applies in particular to his understanding of the manner of divine communication with man. Guru Nanak's concepts of the *Sabad*, the *Nam*, the *Guru*, and the *Hukam* carry us beyond anything that the works of earlier Sants offer in any explicit form. It is Sant thought which we find in his works, but it is Sant thought expanded and reinterpreted. The result is a new synthesis, a synthesis which is cast within the pattern of Sant belief but which nevertheless possesses a significant originality and, in contrast with its Sant background, a unique clarity. It possesses, moreover, the quality of survival, for it remains today the substance of a living faith.

Professor McLeod restates his position on the issue of 'origins' in the *Evolution of the Sikh Community*. In a certain sense Guru Nanak can be regarded as a founder. 'The following which gathered around this man was certainly the original nucleus of the Sikh Panth and if we are to follow organizational lines in our movement back through history we shall be able to proceed no further than this nucleus and this man'. In another sense, however, the term founder can be misleading: it suggests that Guru Nanak originated not

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 161.

merely a group of followers but also 'a school of thought, or set of teachings'. This can be accepted in a highly qualified sense. 'If we place Guru Nanak within his own historical context, if we compare his teachings with those of other contemporary or earlier religious figures, we shall at once see that he stands firmly within a well-defined tradition. What Guru Nanak offers us is the clearest and most highly articulated expression of the nirguna sampradaya, the so-called Sant tradition of Northern India'.<sup>144</sup>

In a recent publication, McLeod observes that in 1969 the then Chief Justice of India spoke in the Albert Hall on the life of Guru Nanak on the basis of the *Janamsakhis* but when he came to the teachings of the Guru the tone of the speech changed dramatically: 'It soon became clear that much of it had been drawn from *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, some of it word for word'. McLeod goes on to add that this became the standard response to his book. His treatment of the teachings of Guru Nanak seems to have been largely accepted. The one significant exception is his treatment of Guru Nanak's status as 'founder' of the Sikh tradition. McLeod reiterates his view that Guru Nanak can be regarded as the founder of the Sikh Panth, and that 'in a certain sense the Panth can be construed as coterminous with the Sikh faith'. This, however, does not face the issue of 'origins'. McLeod repeats that Guru Nanak can be squarely placed within the Sant tradition.<sup>145</sup>

Must we then maintain that the Sikh movement is a Sant movement? Must we conclude that Guru Nanak was a Sant? According to McLeod, if it is a strictly neutral question of antecedents and influences the answer must be in the affirmative.

If, however, the question implies a lack of originality on the part of Nanak the answer must be an emphatic negative. Plainly there is much that is profoundly original in the hymns which we find recorded under his distinctive symbol in the *Adi Granth*. There is in them an integrated and coherent system which no other Sant has produced;

<sup>144</sup> *Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford University Press, 1975, 5.

<sup>145</sup> *The Sikhs: History, Religion and Society*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, 18-19 & 22-31.



there is a clarity which no other Sant has equaled; and there is a beauty which no other Sant has matched. There is, moreover, the question of permanence. The fact that Nanak appointed a successor to follow him is scarcely unique, but nothing in the Sant experience can compare to the Panth which was eventually to emerge from that decision.<sup>146</sup>

We can see that Professor McLeod has not changed but clarified his position. The Sikh Panth originated with Guru Nanak, but not all the ideas which came to be woven into Sikhism.

## VI

W.H. McLeod is not the only Western scholar to have taken interest in Sikh history or Sikhism after Independence. W. Owen Cole published his M. Phil. thesis in 1982 as *The Guru in Sikhism*. He holds the view that every teacher in the Sant tradition had his own particular interests, and made distinctive contribution on the basis of his personal experience. Nevertheless, he merely repeats what McLeod has said about Guru Nanak : 'In him the nirguna sampradaya receives its clearest and most highly articulated expression'.<sup>147</sup> Guru Nanak was unique among the Sants in describing his vivid experience of divine inspiration, though the other Sants also did not recognize any human Guru.<sup>148</sup> Cole attributes to Guru Nanak, and his successors, the aim of uniting the disparate Sant groups into one movement. It seems likely to him that Guru Nanak collected the verses of some of the Sants with a view to consolidating the movement. It is even more likely that he compiled some of his own compositions.<sup>149</sup> Cole underlines that for Guru Nanak the eternal Guru was God Himself, and Guru Nanak was only his minstrel through whom the message was communicated to mankind.<sup>150</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>147</sup> W. Owen Cole, *The Guru in Sikhism*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1982, 14.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 14 & 16.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 19 & 21.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., ix.

Furthermore, the Guru is God manifest as the Word.<sup>151</sup> In his exposition of the Guru in the compositions of Guru Nanak, Cole does not go beyond McLeod, and has no disagreement with him.

Cole's *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708*, published two years later, was meant to refute McLeod's conclusion that Guru Nanak regarded 'conventional Hindu belief and Islam as fundamentally wrong'.<sup>152</sup> Cole does not doubt that McLeod possesses a 'considerable knowledge of the hymns of Guru Nanak' but he does believe that in drawing this conclusion McLeod has not drawn upon that knowledge. McLeod's inference appears to be syllogistic to Cole: Guru Nanak was a Sant and, since the Sants rejected the Vedas and the Qur'an, and Hinduism and Islam generally, Guru Nanak also rejected these religions.<sup>153</sup> Cole proposes, therefore, to examine the compositions of Guru Nanak in their bearing upon his attitude towards Hinduism and Islam.<sup>154</sup>

Cole's argument is elaborate, but not clear or convincing. According to him, the social world of Guru Nanak was predominantly Hindu and his cultural world was steeped in Hinduism. Furthermore, his hymns disclose 'a society dominated by the Puranas and dharmic ritual, not Upanishads and the philosophical systems'.<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, the maximum attention of Guru Nanak, according to Cole, goes to Yoga. Its beliefs, practices and terminology are frequently mentioned. There are specific references to Siddhas and Naths as the men of miracles. Guru Nanak was well aware of their ideas and teachings. Cole is inclined to agree with McLeod that much of Guru Nanak's thought and vocabulary was drawn from the popular currency of his day, but Guru Nanak's knowledge of Yoga was also 'born out of close personal contact and interest'. The source of his knowledge, therefore, was not merely the Sant tradition, but also his actual contact with *kanphatas*.<sup>156</sup> However, Guru Nanak's familiarity with Yoga did not imply even its partial acceptance. There was no

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>152</sup> W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context, 1469-1708*, D.K. Agencies, New Delhi, 1984, 6.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 271, 273 & 285.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-24.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-46.



hope in the path of Yoga because of its ideal of renunciation which threatened the orderliness of society as conceived by Guru Nanak. In fact, according to Cole, Guru Nanak perceived the greatest threat from Yoga rather than from Islam.

The three major deities of Hinduism, that is Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, are relegated by Guru Nanak to the category of created beings.<sup>157</sup> The caste system is 'so redefined by Guru Nanak that its validity is repudiated'.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, the whole concept of *varanashrama* is discarded in favour of the life of a Gursikh in which there is no *varana* and there is no *ashrama*.<sup>159</sup> The practice of pilgrimage is condemned by Guru Nanak in an unqualified manner.<sup>160</sup> In fact, rituals of all kinds stand rejected in the final analysis. Furthermore, Guru Nanak was opposed to the pointless recitation of the Vedas. He clearly rejected the Yajura and the Atharva.<sup>161</sup> Even the Rig and the Sama were not regarded as eternal.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, scriptures were not regarded as 'essential or even necessary'. Cole likes us to believe, nonetheless, that scriptures were not 'dismissed as worthless'. His argument tends to become logical rather than historical. If Guru Nanak could claim that God as Guru had spoken the Shabad through him, 'it was not easy at the same time to argue that he had not spoken through the Vedas'.<sup>163</sup> The evidence presented by Cole himself makes it difficult to accept his conclusion that Guru Nanak rejected merely the exclusive authority of the Vedas or the exclusive claim of the Brahmans to interpret them.<sup>164</sup>

We may agree with Cole that the Islam of Guru Nanak's hymns 'seems to be less important to him than Hinduism in the influence that it exerts upon the people he addresses'.<sup>165</sup> However, Guru Nanak's hymns reveal a sound awareness of Islam and its essential features. At the same time, Cole gets

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 47-50.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 56-60.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 56-60.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 157-61.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 30.

the impression that Guru Nanak was not familiar with Islamic theology.<sup>166</sup> His familiarity is with the Islam of the Punjab villages in which the Sufis were influential. The representatives of Islam, according to Cole, are criticized by Guru Nanak for their failure to live in accordance with their own teachings. The religious leaders of Islam have become exploiters. Nevertheless, Islam is treated by Guru Nanak with less severity than Hinduism possibly because its hold over the people in the countryside was less, and it was less ritualistic than Hinduism. The fact that Islam had a scriptural revelation made it more congenial perhaps for Guru Nanak. 'However, as with the Vedas so with the Qur'an, intellectual knowledge or the reading of scriptures is not something of intrinsic virtue'. Guru Nanak's relative appreciation for the Sufi way of life enables Cole to comment that had he held the Sant attitude towards Islam and Hinduism he would not have uttered these verses.<sup>167</sup> Cole does not take into account those verses in which Guru Nanak denounces the Shaikhs. By such omissions, albeit innocent, Cole has no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that Islam in the eyes of Guru Nanak was 'a path by which the truth could be reached'.<sup>168</sup> At the same time, Cole is keen to maintain that Islam had no influence on Guru Nanak who uses the language of Islam when it suits his purposes but does not borrow any ideas. Guru Nanak had a clear perception of what he regarded as truth. His treatment of Islam demonstrates his ability 'to distinguish between the essential and the unimportant features of religion'.<sup>169</sup> 'He is first and foremost stating what he considers to be the truth he has experienced'.<sup>170</sup>

Cole is keen to underline that Guru Nanak's theology was essentially an attempt to articulate his crucial experience at Sultanpur. There is no evidence in his hymns that Guru Nanak was interested in Hindu-Muslim reconciliation. Cole rejects the view that Guru Nanak was attempting to reconcile Hindus and Muslims by producing some mutually acceptable

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 25-30.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 89-94.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 96-97.



theological synthesis. Guru Nanak's conception of God appears to Cole to be typically Hindu, because his God is actively and continuously involved in creative work. To underline the 'Hindu' character of Guru Nanak's thought, Cole does not hesitate to assert that there is no element in his thought 'which cannot be found somewhere in the Hindu tradition'. Cole concedes that there is much in Guru Nanak that could have been derived from Islam, but 'there is no need to go to Islam if a Hindu background can be pointed to'.<sup>171</sup> Guru Nanak's conception of the 'formless one' becoming *saguna* is seen by Cole as owing more to Hinduism than to Islam. The argument given in this context is rather interesting: only the Sufis and not the Ulama subscribed to the idea of God's immanence.<sup>172</sup>

Cole's preoccupation with the 'Hindu' character of Sikh thought obliges him to forget his own advice that important issues are better settled in the light of contemporary evidence. Cole does not mind invoking later Sikh history in support of his own conclusions. It is with reference to Bhai Kahn Singh's *Ham Hindu Nahin* that Cole makes the following statement:<sup>173</sup>

Guru Nanak did not provide those who accepted his message with an alternative way of life. This is one reason why it has always been easy for Sikhs, culturally Hindus, to slip back into the religion from which the vast majority of them came. It was only in later time, when the Sikhs felt the need for a separate identity of their own, that they attempted to establish a dharma to match the assertion 'We are not Hindus'.

Here, Cole appears to imply that since the Sikhs were asserting their separate identity around 1900, they could not have a distinct identity earlier.

Cole's conclusion that Guru Nanak was recalling Hinduism (and Islam) to the path from which they had strayed, the path of truth which they essentially possessed, is contradicted by some of his own observations. Trying to propose harmonious lifestyle, Guru Nanak was perhaps 'searching for a common

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 79-81.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 85-87.

way of life which can lead to peaceful living if each faith could recognize that the truth which could be found at the centre of Hinduism and Islam transcended both'.<sup>174</sup> True to his experience at Sultanpur, Guru Nanak stood for a universal Dharma based on the unity of God 'who may be reached through Hinduism and Islam; but who lies beyond them and transcends both'. Cole goes on to add that Guru Nanak's God 'discloses himself to Hindu and Muslim alike as he wishes, and that he has ordained one way of life for all men and women, one based on a new concept of family and directed towards worship of God through the service of one's fellows'.<sup>175</sup> In Cole's view, Guru Nanak had no intention of founding 'a distinctive movement, much less a religion', but he had to respond to the needs of his followers. As a practical man, he clearly realized the need for men to organize themselves for spiritual development and sustenance. That was why he set up a daily routine and a form of worship based on the singing of his own hymns. If Guru Nanak underlines good deeds and Gurbani as the source of glory in the Kaliyug in place of the Atharva Veda, Cole likes to believe that Gurbani could still refer to other scriptures. Even Cole can see, however, that 'such words as these could be interpreted as an encouragement to accept the teachings and faith of Sikhism and join the Sikh Panth'.<sup>176</sup> Cole's whole argument, thus, tends to move in a circle. There is a lot of scope for disagreement with his interpretation of many a hymn or verse of Guru Nanak.<sup>177</sup> At any rate, Cole's disagreement with McLeod gets so diluted that it becomes merely a verbal assertion without the substance of a sustained argument. Much of the time he appears to present evidence against his own contention.

Christopher Shackle has written a short book on the

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 105-06.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 106-07.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 162-65.

<sup>177</sup> In Cole's bibliography is listed *Guru Nanak in History* by J.S. Grewal, but there is no indication in the text that Cole makes any use of this work, though it is the most relevant for his own. In *Guru Nanak in History*, the milieu of Guru Nanak is reconstructed on the basis of sources other than the compositions of Guru Nanak, and his response to the political, social and religious milieu is then studied on the basis of a thorough analysis of his compositions.



Sikhs as a report for the Minority Rights Group. There was hardly any scope for detailed treatment of Guru Nanak's faith in a booklet meant to cover the whole span of Sikh history, but even a short statement by a British scholar who has devoted time to the study of Punjabi language, including the language of the *Adi Granth*, is not without significance. Shackle starts by referring to the political dominance of the Delhi Sultanate and the conversion from lower Hindu castes to Islam, 'attracted by the prospect of improvement in their status and drawn by the appeal of the mystical version of Islam promulgated by the Sufi missionaries'.<sup>178</sup>

Within the world of Hinduism, which still embraced the majority of the subjects of the Sultans, arose powerful movements of religious renewal to challenge the legalistic ritualism of the orthodox Brahmins. Some of these movements took a particular incarnation of god as their object of devotion, notably Krishna. Conscious of the dangers of idolatry inherent in such personalized devotional cults, some other teachers sought to direct the loving adoration of their followers to the One God Himself, conceived as being able to be known only by those who would listen in their hearts to the call He graciously bestows through the True Guru as the manifestation of His message to humanity. 'From the uncompromising interiority of this central teaching there inevitably followed a rejection of the claims of the doctrines and rituals of orthodox or devotional Hinduism, or those of Islam, to point to the path of human salvation'.<sup>179</sup>

Shackle goes on to point out that there was a danger implicit in the rejection of institutional authority by the exponents of devotion to Formless God. Howsoever powerfully expressed, the initial impetus of their teachings was likely to be weakened by time in the absence of institutional framework. This in fact proved to be the case with most of the movements based on the ideal of devotion to the Formless God. 'Becoming formless themselves, they were soon accommodated into the ever-embracing strands of the Hindu tradition from which they had emerged'.<sup>180</sup> The origins of Sikhism can be traced to

<sup>178</sup> Christopher Shackle, *The Sikhs*, Amrit Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985 (First Indian Edition).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.



reformist Hinduism. Though closely linked to Hinduism, the Sikhs have stood out as a community which has successfully maintained its own separate identity. The Sikhs of Guru Nanak were taught to follow 'the practical existence of the householder' as their way of life in direct contrast to the ascetic ideals so prominent in most Indian religious traditions. Their chief act of devotion was to be singing of the Guru's hymns which embody his teachings in 'poetry of formidable beauty and insight'. As the core teachings of Sikhism, these precepts have been summed up in the triple commandment to 'adore the Divine Name, practice one's livelihood, and share its fruits'. The successful maintenance of its identity by the Sikh community was due to 'the power of Guru Nanak's teachings' and the administrative skills of his successors.<sup>181</sup>

Several other Western scholars have shown interest in Guru Nanak on the basis of their general interest in religion. David B. Harned, for instance, has underlined the relevance of Guru Nanak for a world which is being increasingly secularized. The process of secularization, 'by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols', involves 'the transformation of religion': man's religious quest becomes in many ways a private affair. In this context, the teachings of Guru Nanak appear to be of crucial importance to Harned. He brings in the concept of the holy as distinct from sacred. Guru Nanak learnt that before the holy nothing is sacred and nothing is profane. 'Religious wiles do not suffice to attain the holy, nor do secular ways bar man from it'. Guru Nanak's distrust of rite and ritual was the result of his conviction that faith in God does not commit man to travel down religious ways. His protest was rooted in 'a profound sense of the holy, its ontological immanence and moral transcendence'. In the end, the paraphernalia of religion is unavailing if man is without grace, and unnecessary if he has received it. Guru Nanak espoused a sort of 'holy worldliness'. The polarity of the religious and the secular is foreign to the spirit of the Sikh tradition. Guru Nanak moved away from the distinctions between the religious and the secular, between the sacred and the profane. In his adventure lies 'a profound moral for

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 9 & 11.



our time and, perhaps, the greatest resource for the redeeming of the times'.<sup>182</sup>

On the basis of the *Jap-ji* of Guru Nanak, as rendered into English by Archer, Elliot Deutsch underlines 'the impossibility of man's speaking truthfully about God', because 'He can never be adequately described'.<sup>183</sup> Language is grounded in fundamental distinctions; it is time-bound, spatially ordered, static, and culturally conditioned; and it involves negation as well as affirmation. It can never be adequate for describing God who is 'nowhere' and yet 'everywhere'. Nevertheless, there is a vast literature associated with religion and it speaks of God meaningfully. It uses fascinating symbols, metaphors, paradoxes, parables and myths, which are relevant for religious consciousness. Therefore, the primary function of language in relation to spiritual experience is 'to lead others to the experience'. That is why religious language is a teaching language. It does not reveal the nature of God so much as it communicates the fruit of experience. Guru Nanak spoke this language.<sup>184</sup>

The nature of God in Sikh thought and belief is discussed by Geoffrey Parrinder as a theology which in his view should be of interest to all scholars of religion. He uses the term 'unicity' to connote the uniqueness as well as the oneness of God. The first point of importance for him is the relationship of God to the universe. The God of Guru Nanak's conception is both in and outside the universe; He is both immanent and transcendent at one and the same time. Man can understand something of God through His manifestation. The goal of life is union with God and not absolute identity with Him. This distinction is important for a proper understanding of Guru Nanak's religion. God's revelation appears in his creation.

<sup>182</sup> David B. Harned, 'The Religious, the Sacred, and the Holy: Guru Nanak and Secularization', *Perspectives on Guru Nanak* (ed. Harbans Singh), Punjabi University, Patiala, 1975, 30-44.

Harned was among the American and British scholars who participated in an international seminar held at the Punjabi University, Patiala, in 1969. Only a few of these Western scholars were specialists in Sikh studies, but as scholars of religion they could bring their expertise to bear upon the questions they discussed. Their contributions reveal the recent attitudes of Western scholars towards Sikh studies; nearly half of them took notice of McLeod's work.

<sup>183</sup> Elliot Deutsch, 'Speaking About God', *ibid.*, 93.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-97.

and particularly in the Word (*sabad*) which comes through the Guru. The True Guru is God Himself. However, the human Guru is so close to Him that he appears to be identified with Him sometimes.<sup>185</sup> Talking of divine attributes, revelation and the Guru, Parrinder remains very close to W.H. McLeod.<sup>186</sup>

The question of Guru Nanak's attitude towards Vaishnava *bhakti* is taken up by Norvin Hein on the basis of Guru Nanak's criticism of the Ramlila and the Raslila in his *Asa di Var*.<sup>187</sup> Hein notices first that in describing the activities of certain troupes of Vaishnava actors Guru Nanak provides unique information about a transitional phase in the development of Vaishnava religious drama. The fact that he reacted to these dance dramas rather strongly may be taken as an indication of their influence which, in turn, may be treated as a reflection of the popularity of Vaishnava *bhakti* in at least the Mathura region. This, however, is not the point which Hein is keen to make. 'When we understand Guru Nanak's appraisal of these *lilas* we will understand why Sikhism preserved its separate identity and did not merge in the Hindu Bhakti movement with which it had so many doctrinal and historical ties'.<sup>188</sup>

Guru Nanak did not denounce these *lilas* merely on account of what was immoral in his eyes, the improprieties of Krishna and the *gopis*, or the prostitution of a sacred profession by the actors for the sake of monetary gain. He saw a theological misconception at the bottom of their whole theatrical enterprise. Their assumption that God makes himself manifest in a form accessible to the senses was totally wrong; their assumption that they themselves became manifestations of those divine manifestations was an impudent absurdity.

To Guru Nanak this is a notion that is full of pride and futility. He believes that God is not only transcendental but ever unique in relation to His creation. The knowledge

<sup>185</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, 'The Nature of God', *ibid.*, 83-92.

<sup>186</sup> The article by Parrinder, like some others in this volume, is unthinkable without McLeod's work on Guru Nanak.

<sup>187</sup> Norvin Hein, 'Guru Nanak's Comment on the Vaishnava Lilas' : *ibid.*, 493-97.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.



of the True One will never come, therefore, in any experience of the eye or the ear. It comes only through a unique channel of its own, supersensual and inward, when the Guru speaks wordlessly in the heart of a believer.<sup>189</sup>

In this illuminating hymn of Guru Nanak, Hein sees 'Sikhism and Vaishnavism making their own distinctive choices in one of the great options of the religious life'. Guru Nanak chooses a universalist path that relies upon an intuitive awareness of a transcendent God 'who is not knowable in outward form of any culture'. The God of Vaishnava Bhakti is adored in the context of a specific culture.<sup>190</sup>

Some of the Western scholars have shown interest in Sikhism because of their concern for religion in general. Kenneth W. Morgan, for example, refers to the common problems faced by religious communities everywhere. 'One sensitive area of common concern is the ever wider use of historical criticism of religious traditions and religious writings, now increasingly combined with psychological and anthropological studies of religious practices'.<sup>191</sup> All religious communities have to come to terms with science and technology as well as the social sciences. 'Scholars from all religious communities must contribute all they can to an understanding of the problems raised by the natural sciences, the social sciences, the historical method, by governmental policies, and by social changes, but first of all, religious scholars must use their skills to guide their religious communities towards the kind of understanding that will eliminate religious rivalries and religious distrust'.<sup>192</sup> The Sikhs too are relevant: They face the problem of maintaining their religion as a minority group in a rapidly changing world'.<sup>193</sup>

Marcus Braybrooke talks of 'interfaith cooperation' and the 'unity of all faiths' in the context of the attempts made at mutual understanding since the World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893. Each religion has a distinctive flavour and a particular contribution to make to 'the Wholeness

189 Ibid., 499.

190 Ibid., 500.

191 Kenneth W. Morgan, 'The Next Fifty Years': Ibid., 337-43.

192 Ibid., 343-44.

193 Ibid., 343.

of Truth'. Not only the comparative study of scriptures and doctrines but also real encounter at personal level is necessary for this interfaith cooperation. Guru Nanak has much to teach us in this connection. After his vision of God his first utterance was: 'I see here neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, only a man'. Braybrooke has relied here on Gopal Singh. We cannot blame him for being too trustful. But he rightly points out that Guru Nanak's personal experience enabled him to see the limitations of ritual and the importance of a holy life. Braybrooke looks for universal brotherhood in a vision of God who is all-Truth.<sup>194</sup>

The difference in the approach of the scholar of comparative religion and that of the historian comes out very clearly in Noel Q. King's critique of W.H. McLeod.<sup>195</sup> King refers to the history of religious studies in the West in order to suggest that critical scholarship is a native growth in Judaism and Christianity, and that critical study and Christianity have come to a *modus vivendi*. Western scholars have turned their attention to oriental studies too, producing good, bad or indifferent results. King draws the general conclusion that the personality and circumstances of a scholar influence his work. Important among the personal factors which have a close bearing on one's work is the fact whether or not one is a believer. Just as a believer may have his biases, so can a non-believer disillusioned with his own tradition have a jaundiced outlook. At the present stage in historical studies, particularly in the study of religion, modesty and restraint are necessary, because the intellect of man, though a wonderful faculty, has after all its limitations. In studying a religious tradition which is different from one's own it is even more necessary to be considerate of the feelings of those who belong to that tradition.

After his observations on the mixed or dubious role played by critical scholarship in the West, King takes up the case of Hew McLeod in relation to his work on Sikhism. He notices, first, that only a few Western scholars have turned to Sikh studies. The first important scholar was Ernest Trumpp who

<sup>194</sup> Marcus Braybrooke, 'I See Only Man', *ibid.*, 164-69.

<sup>195</sup> Noel Q. King, 'Orientalism, Critical Scholarship and the Sikh Religion', *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition* (ed. Gurdev Singh), Siddharth Publications, Patiala, 1986, 41-52.



alienated the Sikhs by some of his vicious remarks and contemptuous attitude. The second was M.A. Macauliffe who set the balance right by showing great respect for Sikhism. The third was C.H. Loehlin who was restrained enough not to say anything derogatory to the Sikhs and their faith. The fourth is W.H. McLeod, 'easily in the lead among foreign scholars, past or present'. Compared with the native scholars he is even taller.<sup>196</sup>

However, all is not well in King's view with his leading Western scholar of Sikhism. The purpose of his books differs widely from the expectations of many of his readers. McLeod addresses himself to the scholars. In his work, therefore, there are 'meticulously and exhaustively carried out drills in certain methods of western criticism'. Many of his readers would want to know something of the well-springs of Sikhism, to know what made the founder of the movement 'tick'. But this is something which the reader does not find in McLeod's work. Furthermore, King feels unhappy about McLeod's general attitude towards religion, and about his assumption that critical scholarship can always provide the right answer. King does not call for a moratorium on critical scholarship, but he does call for a new approach to the history of religion.<sup>197</sup>

It is Professor King's considered view that we cannot study religion as a set of economic, social and psychological factors, because in such an approach the believer is bound to look like a fool, or a charlatan. The critical approach appears to empty religion of its meaning and value for human life.<sup>198</sup> King does not tell us more about how to study religion. As it turns out, his criticism is not directed against Hew McLeod but against the historian's approach, particularly the approach of a rational-empiricist historian.

The scholars of comparative religion themselves have no commendable achievement to show in relation to the study of Sikhism. This at any rate is the view of James R. Lewis. He

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>198</sup> Noel Q. King, 'Capax Imperii? Scripture, Tradition and "European-Style" Critical Method', *Advanced Studies in Sikhism* (ed Jasbir Singh Mann and Harbans Singh Saraon), Sikh Community of the North America, Irvine, 1989, 3-15.



quotes Edward W. Said to introduce the subject of orientalism in the service of imperialism. He believes, a little prematurely though, that the early phase of Western writing on the Sikhs has been analysed. His own concern is with the treatment of Sikh tradition in the textbooks on world religions. These books contain errors of fact. This is true of all kinds of historical writing. The point which Lewis wishes to underline is that these errors persist when accurate information is available if one were to look for it. Superficial interest in the Sikh tradition, in his view, appears to be the cause. Indifference breeds sloppy scholarship, and indifference to cultures other than one's own is a cultural phenomenon. Whereas some of the specialists among the Western scholars have begun to take the Sikh tradition seriously, the average reader is still being fed on stereotypes created by the early writers who were writing to promote self-interest rather than self-understanding, and much less for understanding the Sikh tradition. Among the Western writers who have enabled Lewis to have a correct perspective on the Sikh tradition are W.H. McLeod, W. Owen Cole and Christopher Shackle.<sup>199</sup>

Lewis is anxious to explode the myth of the syncretism of Sikhism. It was a myth created by the Christian missionaries who could not entertain the idea that any religion other than Christianity could be genuine. However, the missionaries were not the only party to the creation of this stereotype. The whole debate about the 'originality' of Sikhism in his view is rather misplaced. No new religion is conceived in a historical vacuum, and no faith is inscribed on a clean slate. All the ideas associated with Buddhism, Christianity or Islam cannot be altogether new ideas. Therefore, either all these religions are syncretic or Sikhism too is a new faith, a new religion. Lewis does not deny the similarity of ideas, but his position is more categorical than McLeod's. We may agree with Lewis that to point to common or similar ideas is not to deny the 'originality' of a faith. In any case, 'the characterization of the Sikh tradition as a syncretism is a holdover from the days when all the world religions were compared with Christianity for the purpose of demonstrating Christianity's superiority'.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>199</sup> James R. Lewis, 'Misrepresentations of the Sikh Tradition in World Religious Textbooks', *ibid.*, 265-77.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 269-71.



The alternative for the Western scholars, by implication, is to come out of the spiritual and intellectual quagmire of self-centredness.

## VII

In retrospect we can see that most of our writers were closely connected with the government of the East India Company or the Crown: twenty out of thirtyseven. Twelve of them were officers in the army. Six others were in the civil administration. George Forster was a traveller sponsored by the Company, and Ernest Trumpp was an 'orientalist' commissioned by the India Office to translate the Sikh scriptures. However, Trumpp looked upon himself as a scholar. Two of the civilians, Charles Wilkins and H.H. Wilson, were also known better as orientalists. Wilson in fact became a Professor at Oxford. Macauliffe too had left service as a judicial officer before undertaking his work. Thus, the formal position held by a writer, though important in several ways, did not have an exclusive bearing on his work.

Seventeen of our writers were formally independent of the Company and the Crown. Steinbach was an army officer, but in the army of Ranjit Singh and his successors. Dorothy Field was an orientalist based in the United Kingdom. William Ward was a Christian missionary in Bengal, and Frederic Pincott was at one time associated with missions in the Punjab. Three other writers were associated with an academic institution established by Christian missionaries. They were scholars in their own right, and one of them actually left the institution for professional career in a University. Ten other writers were working in academic institutions. On the whole, before 1849 Sikh studies were dominated by the army and civil officers of the East India Company; under colonial rule, the work of the orientalists and scholars connected with Christian missions and institutions became much more important; and after 1947, the field has been occupied by academics. India was more accessible to Western writers for residence or work before 1947, but this alone would not explain why scholars interested



in Sikh studies are now connected with Centres of Oriental Studies, Centres of South Asian Studies, Centres of Religious Studies or Departments of History in the West.

The late eighteenth-century officers and others connected with the East India Company were interested primarily in providing information on the strength and disposition of the Sikh chiefs, who had then recently risen into power, in order to serve the interests of the East India Company. The connection between political events and publication of works on the Sikhs would further reinforce this inference. Malcolm's *Sketch of the Sikhs* appeared soon after the Treaty of Amritsar signed by the East India Company with Ranjit Singh in 1809. Prinsep's book on Ranjit Singh was published soon after the Indus Navigation Treaty of 1832. Osborne's book followed upon the Tripartite Treaty of 1838. McGregor's *History* was written in justification of the first Anglo-Sikh War as much as to glorify the deeds of the British officers. J.D. Cunningham addressed himself to the British nation rather than the East India Company. But he was nonetheless keen to see his work out before the second Anglo-Sikh War in the hope that it might influence events. The increasing volume of British writings on the Sikhs after the death of Ranjit Singh was an eloquent evidence of increasing British interest in the kingdom of his successors.

The administrators of the British empire did not take any serious interest in the Sikh past after the subversion of the kingdom of Lahore. They were more interested in the present, or in the recent past. Lepel Griffin, C.H. Payne and G.B. Scott can be seen as minor exceptions, but even they wrote entirely on the basis of what was easily available in print. The army officers were now interested in recruitment of the Sikhs to the British Indian army, assuming a close connection between their religious faith and their martial qualities, and between their faith and their loyalty to the empire till at least the First World War. Even the orientalist Macauliffe and Dorothy Field did not ignore the political dimension of Sikh studies.

The Christian missionaries assumed a close link between faith and morals. Since Christianity in their belief was the only true faith in the world, Christianity alone could improve the moral condition of Indians. They wanted to see British



India opened up for evangelization, and once it was done they were keen to establish their 'stations' and institutions all over British India. They tried to learn the languages of the people whom they wished to address, prepared grammars and dictionaries, tried to study their social customs and manners, their religious beliefs and practices, sought to educate them in Western literature and science, and undertook humanitarian work in the service of evangelization. Themselves in favour of moral imperialism, the Christian missionaries were not unwilling to support the colonial regime, looking upon British conquest as a sign of divine providence. Till the last quarter of the nineteenth century, their attitude towards Indian religious traditions remained rather contemptuous and aggressive. William Ward in the early decades of the nineteenth century and Ernest Trumpp in the 1870s present good examples of this general attitude. During the twentieth century, however, their attitudes began to change, partly because of their experience of India and partly due to change in outlook in the Western world. The work of J.C. Archer and C.H. Loehlin can be appreciated in this new context. Though interested primarily in the contemporary situation, the Christian missionaries could not ignore the question of origins and antecedents. They turned more and more to authentic tradition in which the sacred scriptures of India became important. It was in this context that Trumpp turned to the *Adi Granth* and Macauliffe wrote in reaction to his work. C.H. Loehlin's work on the religious literature of the Sikhs can be seen as an extension of this interest.

The scholars known as orientalist generally tried to take interest in issues raised by both politics and religion, by the administrators and the missionaries. Charles Wilkins, for instance, was not personally interested in the Sikhs. But he was quite willing to collect information on them for the benefit of the East India Company. Similarly, H.H. Wilson was not unwilling to place his understanding at the disposal of the Royal Asiatic Society at a time when many in Great Britain were interested in Sikh affairs. Dorothy Field in the early twentieth century merely tried to popularize the views of Macauliffe. The line of demarcation between administrators, missionaries and orientalist begins to be blurred when they start using original sources, especially the scriptures.



Depending upon the seriousness of a writer's purpose and the competence he brought to his work, the importance of the original impulse appears to become less important.

It is possible to see the emergence of academic purposes as the culmination of political, evangelical and orientalist objectives rather than a new departure. For a proper appreciation of this development we have to look back to the rise of rationalist-empiricist outlook in Western Europe during the eighteenth century. In this outlook, intellectual curiosity was closely allied with its practical use. Bacon's dictum of 'knowledge is power' had become acceptable in social as well as natural domains. Since historical interpretation could never be value-free or devoid of practical implications, a close connection between cognition and praxis was not a peculiarity of the Western study of the Sikhs.

When the servants of the East India Company started collecting information on the Sikhs they assumed that 'knowledge is power'. Though interested primarily in the present, they turned to the past for better 'knowledge'. Perhaps unconsciously in some cases, they wanted to know whether or not the secret of Sikh success lay in the movement initiated by Guru Nanak. 'What did Guru Nanak stand for?' became an important question for the Christian missionaries and orientalists as well. The quality of an answer depended upon how seriously the question was sought to be answered. The writers whom we label as 'academic' profess to take the question seriously. They go into the answers already given in order to come out with more satisfactory answers if they can. It does not follow, however, that no administrator, no missionary and no orientalist ever took this question seriously. Some of them did, and their answers contributed to the growth of a meaningful study of Guru Nanak.

The competence of a writer, including his linguistic equipment, was as important as his purpose. None of the early Western writers on the Sikhs acquired even a working knowledge of Punjabi in Gurmukhi script to have first hand access to the most important sources for the study of Guru Nanak. Malcolm got some scriptural sources and *Janamsakhis* partially translated for him into English, but his understanding of the original sources remained rather superficial. The extracts given by Cunningham in the appendices of his book



indicate that the translator had a good understanding of the original, if he was someone other than Cunningham. Trumpp learnt the Punjabi-Gurmukhi for translating the *Adi Granth*, but his understanding of the original remained inadequate. Macauliffe fared better. After him, the number of Gurmukhi knowing scholars increased: Archer, Loehlin, McLeod, Cole and Shackle. Whereas the early writers depended largely on oral evidence, commissioned works and translations, the serious writers after Trumpp and Macauliffe have tended to make use of the original sources together with translations. Of course there were many who wrote on the basis of 'secondary works' but their work remained derivative. Conversely, the writers whose work proved to be seminal had a good understanding of original sources: J.D. Cunningham before 1849, M.A. Macauliffe in the early twentieth century, and W.H. McLeod after 1947.

Another way of looking at the development of the study of Guru Nanak by Western writers is to see the general character of their work. In the beginning we come upon a few sentences or a few paragraphs on Guru Nanak; in the middle, we can read a chapter or an article; towards the end, we have whole monographs discussing his position. cursorily written accounts on the basis of secondary works have continued into the twentieth century, but the oral evidence of the early decades has been increasingly replaced by the use of original sources, either in Punjabi-Gurmukhi or in English translation. Work produced in academic institutions shows evidence of sophisticated scholarship on the basis of systematic research and meticulous referencing, as in the publications by W.H. McLeod and W. Owen Cole. It must be added that during the twentieth century Western writers have been increasingly taking into account the work produced by Indian scholars, especially Sikh scholars. To what extent, therefore, the work of the Western scholars remains strictly 'western' becomes a relevant question. In any case, the Western scholars no longer address themselves entirely to the Western world; a scholarly discourse is developing with the possibility of participation across national or continental boundaries.

The basic concerns of the Western writers on Guru Nanak have been restricted more or less to ideology. They have shown more interest in the ideas of Guru Nanak than in his



practices in the context of his socio-religious milieu. The relationship of his ideas with the contemporary systems of belief, both Hindu and Islamic, has also been an important concern. Our writers have concentrated generally on *bhakti* in the Hindu tradition, and on Sufism in Islam. An equally important concern has been with the nature of Guru Nanak's movement; whether it was a Hindu reform, a syncretic faith, or a new religious dispensation meant to transcend all contemporary forms of religious belief and practice. All these views were expressed quite early, but only on the basis of slender evidence. Different writers have elaborated these views on the basis of original evidence, revealing the difficulties involved in interpretation. However, if we confine ourselves to seminal or influential works, we notice that J.D. Cunningham gave an exposition of Guru Nanak's position which tends to make him the founder of a new faith that took into account both Islam and 'Hinduism' and transcended both. Macauliffe minces no words to underline that Guru Nanak founded a new religion. W.H. McLeod underlines Guru Nanak's affinity with the Sants like Kabir who stood for a system different from Vaishnava *bhakti*; he also underlines the originality of Guru Nanak in combining the received ideas, much modified or elaborated, to evolve his own system. McLeod subscribes to the idea that a new Panth started with the followers of Guru Nanak. In the eyes of his Western critics, he minimizes the importance of Guru Nanak's familiarity with his milieu and the significance of his personal experience at Sultanpur. The scholars of comparative religion criticize his rational-empiricist approach without expounding or exemplifying their own. However, they generally look upon him as the most eminent among the Western scholars of Guru Nanak. There is a long way, indeed, from Major James Browne to Professor W.H. McLeod.

